Wii MAGIC!

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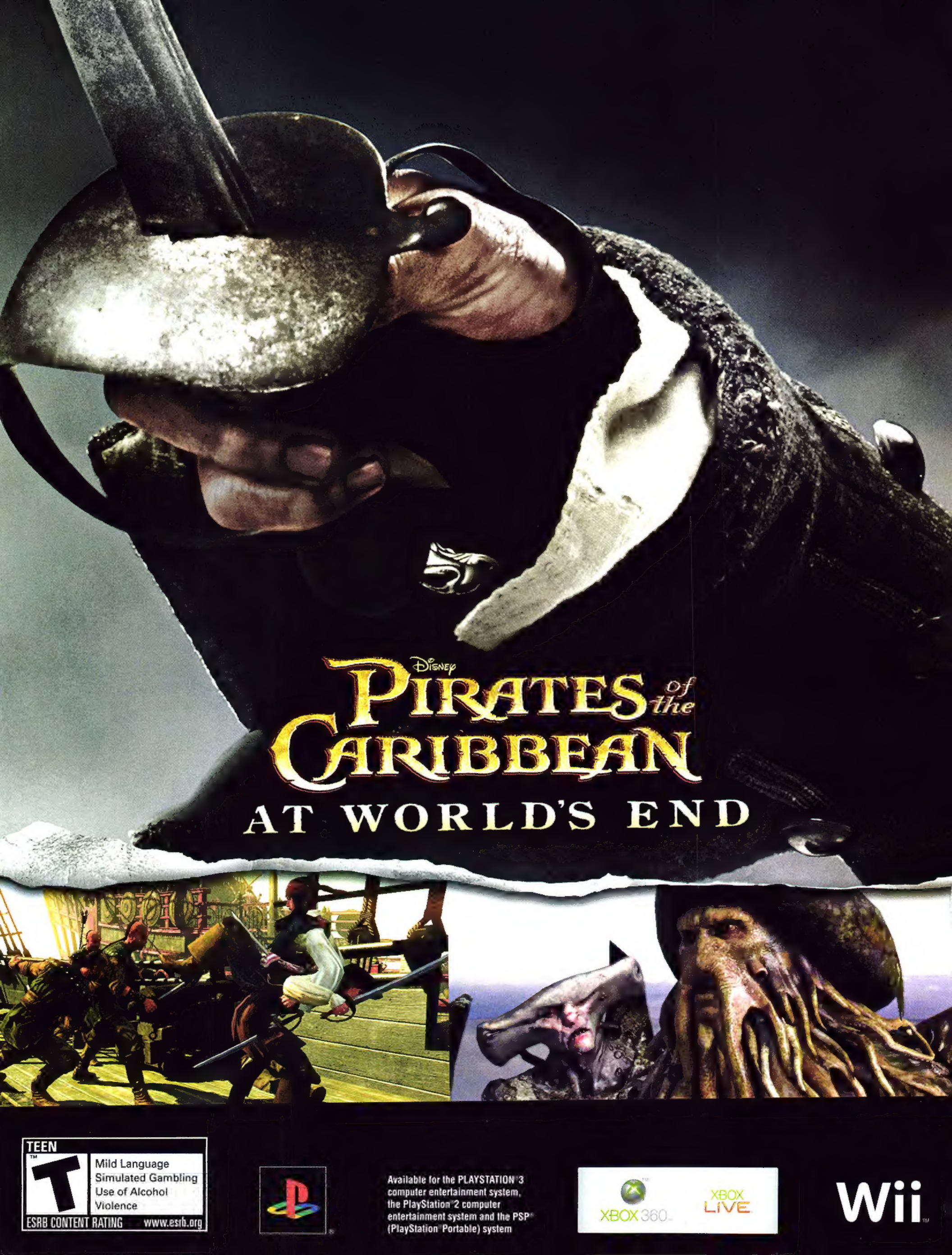
Disney
PIRATES of the CARIBBEAN
AT WORLD'S END
TEEN
T
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Use of Alcohol
Violence
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NINTENDO POWER

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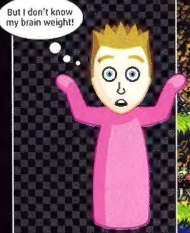
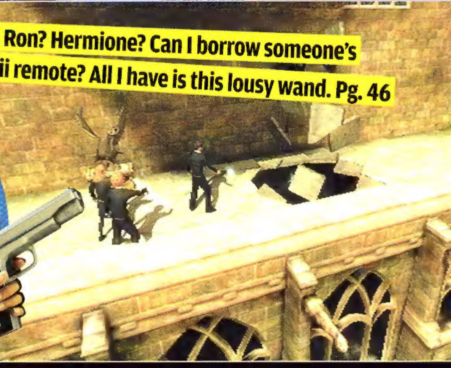

But I don't know my brain weight!



Uhh, Ron? Hermione? Can I borrow someone's Wii remote? All I have is this lousy wand. Pg. 46

That's one way to blow out the candles. Pg. 50

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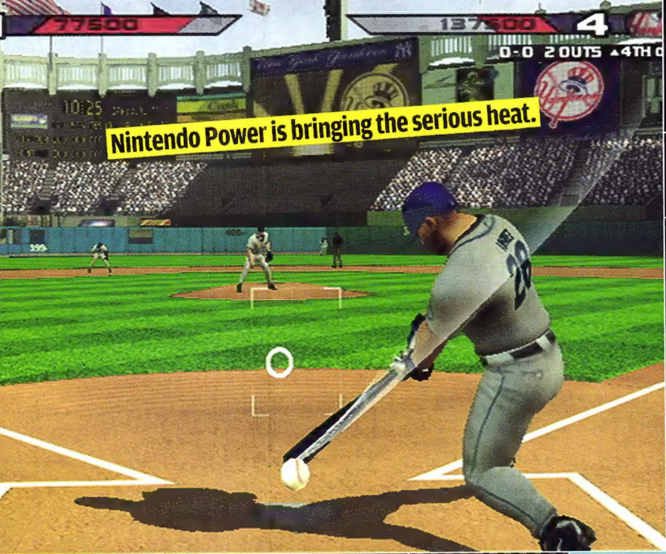

Nintendo Power is bringing the serious heat.

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BATALLION WARS RETURNS TO THE FRONT LINE; SONIC FEELS THE RUSH; DRIVER STAYS IN LINE; NARUTO USES THE WRONG NAME; DK HANGS AROUND; EA LIKES TO BOOGIE; BRICKDOWN HAS THE JITTERS; THE MANHUNT IS ON; AND MORE

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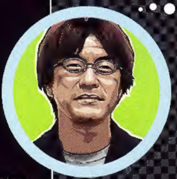

I might be standing here, but my mind's in Hyrule.

Battalion Wars 2 busts out the heavy artillery.

Roid
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Fire

A purple crocodile in a top hat? That's hilarious! Pg. 80

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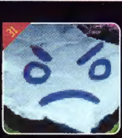

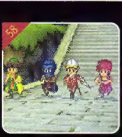

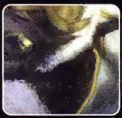
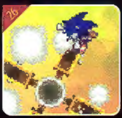

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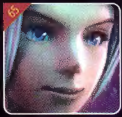
A NEW WEAPO



DS = Nintendo DS
SNES = Super Nintendo Entertainment System
VC = Wii Virtual Console
Wii = Wii

Theo
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Pulse

JUST FOR YOU

The release of Soulcalibur II for GameCube in the summer of 2003 was a true delight. Not only was it an excellent fighting game on a platform that sorely lacked quality fighters, but the exclusive (and very powerful) Link character added just the right cool factor to make the GameCube version a huge success for Namco. So when Namco Bandai approached us several months ago with the chance to bring you the first in-depth look at a Soulcalibur game for Wii, we booked a flight to Japan. We expected to find a fighting game perfectly suited to Wii's unique control; we imagined legendary sword duels between Wii-remote-wielding combatants, hopefully to take place in a large room devoid of furniture and small pets. Little did we suspect that Namco Bandai would ditch the franchise's tournament formula and shock us with a full-blown adventure! But that's exactly what they did, and because we love you so much, you can learn all about Soulcalibur Legends in these very pages.

Of course, bringing you the tastiest Nintendo news tidbits is our mission in life, and we've been as busy as beavers in a particularly delectable forest this month. Steve Thomason met with Namco Bandai on his trek to Tokyo, plus spent several days exploring Square Enix's vast 2007 lineup of DS and Wii titles. He even had time to stop by Tecmo and chat with famed Ninja Gaiden developer Tomonobu Itagaki. Back here in North America, the crew took on perilous quests to bring you scoops on Harry Potter and Lara Croft in their respective Wii debuts. What are you waiting for? Get reading!

Scott Pelland
Managing Editor

LETTERS

VIRTUAL REALITY?

I have a question that I bet a lot of Virtual Console fanatics have been asking: What happened with Zelda II and Vectorman? Both were mentioned in Volume 215, which I got in March. It's now May and there's still no Zelda II or Vectorman on the Virtual Console.

Carrtoondragon
via the Internet

In Volume 217 you guys talked about the original Paper Mario being on the Virtual Console. I was really excited because I'd lost my copy of the game years ago and I really wanted to play it again. I was heartbroken when I didn't find it on the Virtual Console after I'd accumulated enough Wii Points to buy it.

Jack C.
via the Internet

It's always the case that games may slip from their expected release window after we go to print. We strive to present the new games in as timely a manner as possible, but these things happen.

WITH GREAT POWER COMES . . .

Do you realize the power that you guys have? What you say affects what thousands of people do; for example, if you write that a game is horrible, people won't buy it. Have you ever thought of using this power to your advantage to obtain games before others and annoy the gaming community?

LuigiK6
via the Internet

Trust us; we spend most of our days here pondering how we can annoy the gaming community. And we think we do a pretty good job of it, too!

NO MORE LONELY NIGHTS

Now that NiGHTS is officially getting another installment, does that mean we have to stop making "[Blank] is as likely as a NiGHTS sequel" jokes? Unfortunately, "Yeah, that'll happen as soon as Duke Nukem Forever comes out" doesn't roll off the tongue quite as easily.

Yoshial/Blimpie
via the Internet

HOWL AT THE Wii

Do you know if Capcom is thinking about releasing Okami for Wii? Even though they closed Clover Studios (worst decision ever!), I think they should still release it because it was one of the best games I've ever played—possibly even better than Twilight Princess. Plus, the celestial brush techniques would be perfect with the Wii remote.

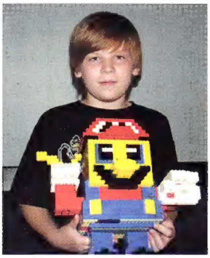
Diddo11d
via the Internet

Several of us around here have played Okami on the PlayStation 2, and we couldn't agree with you more (except maybe for the better-than-Twilight-Princess part). Unfortunately, Capcom doesn't have any plans to bring the title out on Wii.

BLOCKY GRAPHICS

Here's a picture of me with the Mario that I built from scratch using LEGOs. It took me almost all day, but I think it was worth the effort.

Donovan M.
via the Internet



LEFT OUT

While I am a huge fan of the Wii and I'm amazed by what it can do, I still have a few questions. Why do game makers not make a left-handed option for most of the games that come to the Wii? For lefties, it's very annoying to play with your off hand. Thanks for listening.

Andrew R.
via the Internet

We disagree; several of us are left-handed, and we find the Wii remote more liberating than a standard controller—we can switch which hand holds which controller to find the most comfortable configuration.

SUNNY IN THE RISING SUN

I couldn't help but notice that the plot of Super Paper Mario is strikingly similar to the plot of Stephen King's *The Dark Tower*. In *The Dark Tower*, there is a legendary hero, Roland, whose destiny is to defeat the Crimson King, a demon who wants to destroy all the worlds and create one of his own to rule, just like Count Bleck. Along his journey, Roland meets three destined heroes, kind of like how Mario acquires Peach, Bowser, and Luigi. However, in the last stages of his journey, Roland loses his partners, and he must finish the journey alone, similar to how Bowser, Peach, and Luigi left Mario one by one at Castle Bleck. Could this just be a coincidence, or was the plot for Super Paper Mario devised by a group of Stephen King fans?

Vicki K.
via the Internet

You bring up some striking similarities between the two, but in all honesty there are a lot of stories that follow the same plot. They could both stand trial for a lack of originality, but definitely not plagiarism.

THAT'S A WRAP

In Andy's article about Jam Sessions, he mentioned that he's in a band called Hidari Mae. I'm going to assume it means the Japanese words "left" and "front." Does Andy know that Hidari Mae means to be badly off or on a downward course?

Curtis M.
via the Internet

Hidari Mae does mean "left-front." Andy took the name from a way a kimono can be worn, often as a burial gown. This kind of folding typically symbolizes bad or cursed fortune.

ANDY, ACOUSTIC

I downloaded the song that Andy recorded with his band for the Jam Sessions article [Volume 217], and I loved it. Does Hidari Mae have any albums available? It would be great to hear more of Andy and his crew!

Peder H.
via the Internet

Hidari Mae does indeed have an album out that you can still find pretty easily on the Internet. They haven't been very active recently, however; maybe Jam Sessions will be their muse. You can listen to more tunes at www.myspace.com/hidarimae.

SOUNDS FISHY TO US

During the final fight with Ganon in The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess, take out your weakest weapon, the fishing rod. It has a peculiar affect on Ganon: When you throw the rod out, Ganon stares mindlessly at it, obsessed with the juicy worm hanging on the hook. When you pull back the rod, Ganon continues to stare into space, giving you a perfect opportunity to score a few hits. This is a cheap and easy solution to an otherwise difficult boss fight. Maybe Ganon could become a pro fisherman when he retires from being an evil lunatic.

Videogamerat
via the Internet

We gave it a shot, and it worked. Time to recall all those Player's Guides we slaved over. Thanks for nothing, Videogamerat.

THE PRESSURE IS KILLING US

I recently wrote a research paper for my 11th grade honors English class. We got to choose our own topics and I chose Nintendo video games. I was able to use two articles from Nintendo Power magazines—one about the DS and the other about the Wii. I was really happy that I could use two copies of my at least 50 Nintendo Power magazines. I just wanted to thank you for writing such in-depth articles (especially the one on the Wii). That is, unless I fail, in which case my thank-you is withdrawn.

Miriam K.
via the Internet

So we're either praised for your success or we're to blame for your failure. This is uncomfortable. C'mon, Miriam; you can't leave us hanging like that! Let us know if you passed!

YELL ALL YOU WANT, NUTSO

I've heard rumors that in Pokémon Diamond and Pearl, if you yell "gotcha" into the DS microphone just as you toss a Poke Ball, it will double the chances of catching the target Pokémon. I seem to have had some luck with this trick so far, but perhaps the laws of probability are just playing tricks with my mind. Is there any truth to this or am I just making a fool of myself by shouting at my DS?

Mark S.
via the Internet

Man, would we hate to sit next to you on the bus. Sadly, it simply isn't true. Don't feel bad, there have been similar urban legends regarding catching Pokémon since the Red and Blue days.

WHERE HAVE THEY BEEN LOCKING YOU GUYS UP?

My mom thinks that the controls on video games are too complicated for her. Is their any chance you guys could make video game controls easier?

Andrew A
via the Internet

The next time Nintendo designs a console they should try to include a remote to turn the system on and off. I'm in a cast with a broken foot for the next month. Show a little sympathy for the clumsy, please!

Rebecca J.
via the Internet

We heard Nintendo is working on a system code-named "Revolution." It's supposed to be easy enough for your mom to use, and have an on/off button on the controller. Check it out in 2006. That's a joke! We kid the long-term incarcerated!

THE BOOKISH TYPE

I need to address something you wrote in Volume 217's Resident Evil article. You say that the details regarding Private Billy Coen's arrest aren't clear. The reasons are explained *Resident Evil Zero Hour*, a novel by S.D. Perry. It states that Coen was arrested for a mass murder in an African village. In truth, it was his unit that did the murdering—he refused to take part in it and tried to stop them instead. When he returned to America, Private Coen was charged for the crime and sentenced to be executed.

Jermoe
via the Internet

We're too busy playing games to get our read on, but we'll take your word for it. Besides, who do you think we are, The New Yorker*?*

EARLY HUNTING

In your Game Watch Forecast, you listed Manhunt 2 with only one dot, meaning that the game had only been announced. This is incorrect; Rockstar Games even made a press release in February that stated the sequel to Manhunt titled Manhunt 2 for the Sony PlayStation 2, PSP, and Nintendo Wii. They said voice acting for the game had already been recorded by March, 2006.

Herb S.
via the Internet

Since we don't always have the full picture of a title's development timeline, we often have to guess a little at their progress. Also, games take so long to make that they're often well into development by the time they get announced.

AT LEAST WE'LL BE THERE

I was about to sign up for the Penny Arcade Expo today, when I noticed the absence of Nintendo on the list of sponsors. Is Nintendo not going to be at PAX this year? Please say it isn't so!

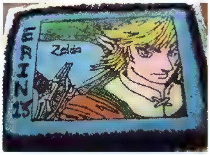
SonicmanX
via the Internet

We're still waiting to hear whether Nintendo itself is going to be a sponsor, but we at Nintendo Power wouldn't miss a gaming event like this for the world, and you shouldn't either.

IN 2-D-LICIOUS

I wanted to let you guys know that I love your magazine and read it cover to cover every month. Here is a photo of an awesome Zelda cake that I got for my birthday! My mom spent all night making it. Keep up the good work!

Erin N.
via the Internet



That's pretty incredible! Of course, now this means you have to make an Oprah cake on your mom's birthday.

DON'T CROSS THE BOSS

You know what really bugs me? Nintendo never comes out with any new bad guys. I mean, every existing game series uses the same bosses. If it's the Mario games, they will use Bowser, and if it's Zelda, they use Ganondorf. I don't mean to be a critic but they could really use some new bad guys.

Kool-guy-t
via the Internet

Franchises like Mario and Zelda remain popular because many characters, not just the headliners, make their returns. Also, both of those series have seen other archvillians, such as Dementio and Vaati.

NEW-SCHOOL WRITING

I've been reading your magazine for a long time, and I'm starting to notice that some of your reviews are kind of half-baked. For example, in Volume 216, your review of Pokémon Diamond and Pearl ends rather abruptly. Instead of winding the whole thing down with a conclusion like a good piece of literature should, you just finish with the fact that you can't fight players in the underground. Did the reviewer write a

Why is Nintendo requiring Pokémon fans to attend events to acquire certain Pokémon? It seems that there are very few Nintendo events in the US compared to Japan, where you practically run into one while walking to school in the morning (not to mention the fact that they can get a few Legendaries that we can't get at all). I want to be able to get rare Legendaries in my Pokémon game just like anyone else.

Nintendo should make up for this by making a new Pokémon game that makes it possible to catch Legendaries like Mew, Jirachi, Celebi, and all the ones from Diamond and Pearl. Make it hard to unlock these rare Pokémon, such as having to perform challenging feats or catch all the other Pokémon first. Just don't make it so you have to buy a plane ticket to catch 'em all.

I realize you guys probably have no say in this, (especially you, Chris Shepperd), but you must feel my pain! I just wanted to throw this out there, as I know I am not alone in this opinion.

Russell R.
via the Internet

Let's clear up a few misunderstandings. First, there aren't any Pokémon in Japan that aren't or won't be available in the United States Second, events in Japan are just as rare as they are here. Now, event Pokémon are hard to get, but they're meant to be passed from one owner to the next—not horded by their original owners. The best advice we can give is to catch the rarest, most difficult Legendary Pokémon you can, then wait for the opportunity to trade it with one of the lucky Trainers who has an event Pokémon.

longer piece and you just ran out of page space or something?

J. Z.
via the Internet

Actually, the literary style we're shooting for is post-modern half-baked. We changed our voice during the redesign.

FREE-MARKET POKéMON

Have you guys had any problems using the Global Trade Station on Pokémon Diamond and Pearl? The biggest problem is that no one seems to understand the concept of a fair trade. Everybody wants Dialga, Palkia, or a Level-100 Pokémon no matter what they're offering! Every time I try to use the GTS I run into this problem! Because of this, I haven't been able get any Pokémon I want from the GTS. It ruins the fun of Diamond and Pearl when the new feature that I was looking forward to most ends up being destroyed by greedy people!

Lynette H.
via the Internet

Don't worry; as soon as people start realizing that nobody's dumb enough to trade a great Pokémon for a so-so one, that's when they'll get their lesson on fair trade.

OPTIMUS PRIMORDIAL

In Volume 217, you included a list of the Transformers series. You forgot a few things on the list that are pre-Generation 1. They are the Diaclone (1980-1985) and Micro Change (1982-1985) toy lines and series (both made by Takara Toys, the manufacturer of Transformers) and Gobots (1983-1986 by Bandai). Diaclone and Micro Change became Transformers. Tonka imported Gobots to the United States. When Tonka was taken over by Hasbro (Takara's distributor for Transformers), Hasbro got the trademarks. Now they are called Transformers Gobots (issued by Playskool, another Hasbro brand).

T. Light
via the Internet

We decided we'd be digressing too much if we delved into pre-Transformers history, but you are correct. We also left off a couple of minor offshoots, such as the Machine Wars toy line introduced in1996. And Gobots? Seriously? Did you even have to bring them up?

FUNGUS AMONGUS

What happened to the little mushrooms at the end of articles? How am I supposed to know when to stop reading? I am not a scientician, you know.

Ronan M.
via the Internet

We're no, umm . . . scienticians, either, but that mushroom has been gone for nearly two years. Our advice is, when you get to the end of an article, stop.

HOLD ON TO THOSE BABIES!

I recently bought a Super Mario Bros. and a Super Mario Bros./Duck Hunt cartridge at a discount store, where they were selling them for less than two dollars each. Could you to tell me how much these would be now at a game retailer?

Patrick N. I.
via the Internet

We're gonna go out on a limb here and say . . . about four dollars total.

CORRECTOR'S CORNER

In the Virtual Console section of Volume 216, you guys wrote that Star Fox 64 had only one skill level. Actually, Star Fox 64 features a much harder Expert mode if you can get every medal in the main game. Expert mode features more enemies, quicker enemy lasers, and your Arwing gets destroyed much faster on collisions.

Carlos V.
via the Internet

I love receiving Nintendo Power every month and I'm always excited to read it. And I realize you're under a time crunch for each issue. However, when an error occurs such as the one on page 19 of the June issue [Volume 216] where you use the word "than" when it should be "then," I wonder how the editors missed something so glaring. Young people reading this magazine will probably think such errors are not a big deal, but written communication is especially important today, when e-mail is one of the most important forms of communication.

Lianne Z.
via the Internet

We have a quarter jar here every time someone lets a erroneous near-homophone slip into the mag. So far we've collected $18,767.50 We're saving up for jet-packs

I read your article about the new upcoming Sonic game for the DS in Volume 217 and it's great! But I've been a big fan of Sonic for a long time, and I think you made a mistake about Tails being a squirrel. He's actually a fox.

Bahaa E.
via the Internet

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NINTENDO POWER

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MOST WANTED

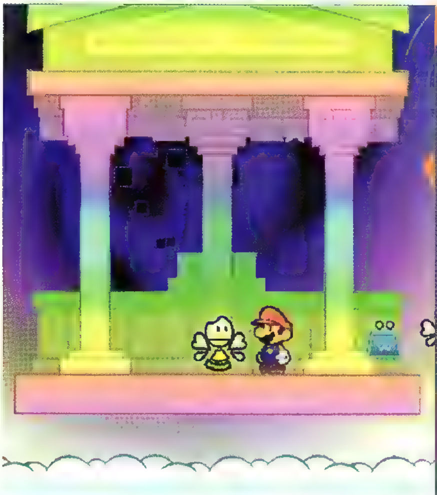
As voted by the readers. Go to nintendo.com/mostwanted and let your voice be heard!

WII

1 Super Smash Bros. Brawl
2 Metroid Prime 3: Corruption
3 Super Mario Galaxy
4 Fire Emblem
5 Harvest Moon Wii

NINTENDO DS

1 The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass
2 Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings
3 Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates
4 Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Trials and Tribulations
5 Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword



>NINTENDO WII

Looky-looky. The old man finally got his act together and showed up on the Wii. He's rewarded with this month's top spot for the effort.

1 Super Paper Mario
2 Wii Play
3 The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess
4 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07
5 WarioWare: Smooth Moves
6 Spider-Man 3
7 Sonic and the Secret Rings
8 Cooking Mama: Cook Off
9 Rayman Raving Rabbids
10 Prince of Persia: Rival Swords

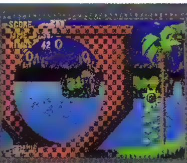
>NINTENDO DS

The new DS Pokémon games didn't simply dominate the DS charts; they blew the rest of the video game world out of the water.

1 Pokémon Diamond
2 Pokémon Pearl
3 New Super Mario Bros.
4 Spectrobes
5 Diddy Kong Racing
6 Mario Kart DS
7 Nintendogs: Dalmatian and Friends
8 Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day
9 Cooking Mama
10 Animal Crossing: Wild World

>VIRTUAL CONSOLE SEGA GENESIS DOWNLOADS TO DATE

Who thought the day would ever come that Nintendo Power would be talking up Sega Genesis games? Times have changed, friends, and we just have to give a blue hedgehog his due.



1 Sonic the Hedgehog
2 Gunstar Heroes
3 Golden Axe
4 ToeJam & Earl
5 Altered Beast

Sales data courtesy of the NPDFunworld TRSTS Video Game Source.

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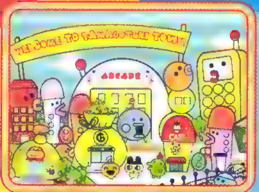

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Wii

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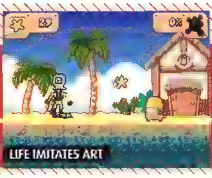
BRAWL UPDATE



LIFE IMITATES ART

RETURN OF THE JEDI

EXCLUSIVE ANNOUNCEMENT

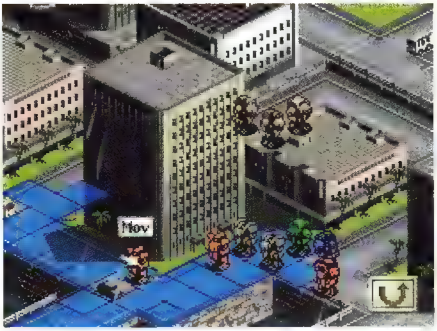
Front and Center

The Wanzers are coming to America. Square Enix announces a US release for Front Mission, a DS remake of the Super NES strategy classic.

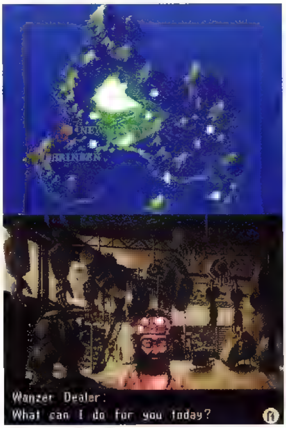
The Front Mission series has long delighted hard-core strategy buffs with its formidable turn-based campaigns, extensive customization options, and intricate stories of global conflict. The first game was released for the Super NES in 1995, but had previously never made it to these shores. This fall, Square Enix will finally remedy that with an extensive DS remake of this 16-bit classic.

The transition to Nintendo's dual-screened handheld comes with a number of benefits. Touch-screen controls allow you to issue commands and move your units with a tap of the stylus, while the top screen conveniently displays all of the vital information pertaining to your mechs (which are called Wanzers in the Front Mission universe). When you engage an enemy unit, the top screen transitions to the battle scene, allowing you to keep an eye on the map at all times. Also new to the DS version are multiplayer battles via local wireless play.

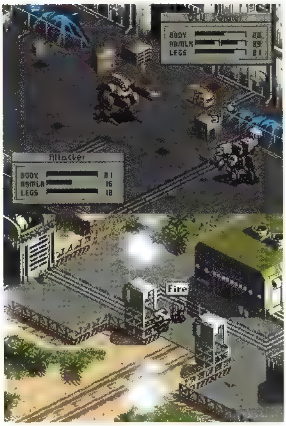
For those of you who have never played a Front Mission game before, the series takes a much more "authentic" approach to giant robots than many of its anime-inspired counterparts. Each of your Wanzers can be outfitted with not only different weapons, but different legs, arms, computers, and torsos, each of which affects the units' various capabilities. And each body part has its own hit points; if a Wanzer's legs are destroyed, for example, it will be rendered immobile for the remainder of the battle. —Steve T.

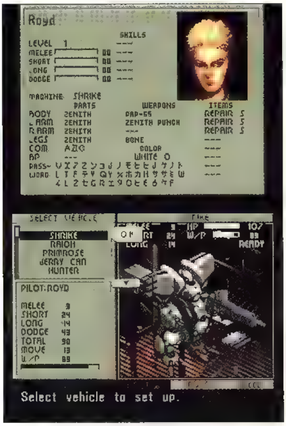


With so many tax dollars going to the defense budget, isn't it high time the US military start developing giant robots?



Wanzer Dealer:
What can I do for you today?


BODY 20
ARMLR 39
LEGS 21
Attacker
BODY 21
ARMLR 16
LEGS 18
Fire

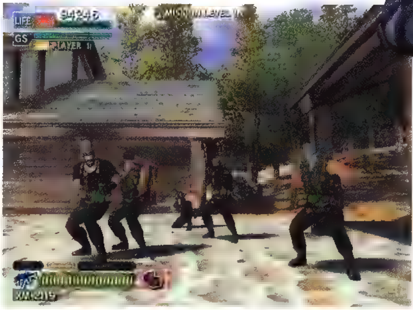

Royd
SKILLS
LEVEL 1
MELEE 00
SHORT 00
LONG 00
DODGE 00
MACHINE SHRIKE
PARTS
WEAPONS
ITEMS
BODY ZENITH
L.ARM ZENITH
R.ARM ZENITH
LEGS ZENITH
COM. AZ0
BP ---
GRP-55
ZENITH PUNCH
BONE
COLOR
WHITE 0
REPAIR S
REPAIR S
REPAIR S
PASS- WORD
SELECT VEHICLE
SHRIKE
RAIOH
PRIMROSE
JERRY CAN
HUNTER
OK
PILOT:ROYD
MELEE 9
SHORT 24
LONG 14
DODGE 43
TOTAL 90
MOVE 13
W/P 89
HP 107
READY

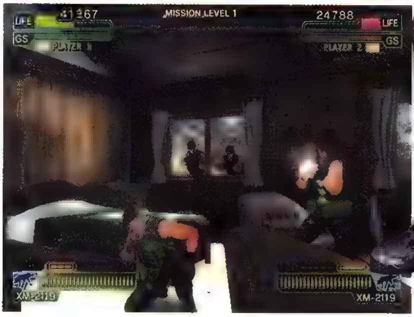
Select vehicle to set up.

Terrorist Busters

The UN's special forces unit infiltrates homes in Sega's Ghost Squad for Wii.

Remember in the movie *The Monster Squad* where that kid faces off against the wolf man, and as it lurches forward, the kid kicks him square in the naughty bits? You don't remember that? Great! Sega's Ghost Squad has absolutely nothing to do with that movie. Ghost Squad is an on-rails shooter—similar to Sega's popular Virtua Cop series—in which you play as an elite special forces agent sent to combat terrorist organizations located all over the world. One mission even puts you in the role of a bad enough dude to rescue the President of the United States from the hijacked Air Force One. Naturally, you'll have plenty of weapons (25 to be exact) at your disposal to take down these enemies of freedom that are coming at you from every direction. You'll also have access to some special gadgetry, such as thermal and night-vision goggles, when day turns to night and the going gets tough. And you don't have to go solo; Ghost Squad features support for up to four players. This will undoubtedly be useful in later portions of the game, when the difficulty ramps up and terrorists are flying at you like there's no tomorrow. —Giancarlo V.



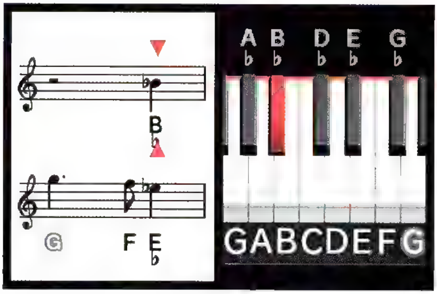


WORK YOUR CORTEX

Noggin News

The original Brain Age sold millions of copies around the globe, so it should be no surprise that Nintendo has a sequel ready for you.

Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day for Nintendo DS will add variety to your daily cerebral workout (beginning August 20th) with a new collection of fun activities. Playing tunes on a piano keyboard, solving word puzzles, getting the upper hand in Rock-Paper-Scissors, counting out exact change, and tracking runners in a footrace are just a few of the many activities in this sequel. You'll also find 100 all-new Sudoku puzzles to ponder. Research shows that performing the game's mental challenges increases blood flow to the prefrontal cortex region of your brain. It may not turn you into a rocket scientist, but if you play regularly you'll see improvement in your Brain Age 2 results, and you may well feel as clever as a 20-year-old student contemplating a career in astrophysics. —Scott P.



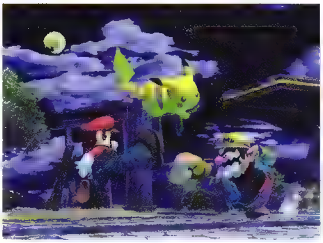
Reading notes on the staff (or the letter equivalent) then tapping them on the keyboard results in a lovely piano ditty.

DAILY SMASHINGS

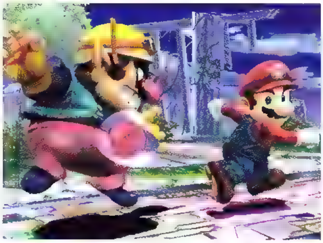
Behold the Brawl!

Smash Bros. Dojo begins its daily dose of Super Smash Bros. Brawl updates. Are you up to speed on the latest and greatest?

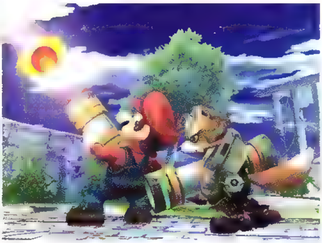
The floodgates have opened. Smash Bros. Dojo—the series' official website (www.smashbros.com)—re-launched on May 22, complete with daily blog entries from Masahiro Sakurai, the godfather of Smash. Sakurai's first offering included a list of 36 composers who are contributing music to the upcoming Wii title, including Akihiro Honda (Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots), Yasunori Mitsuda (Chrono Trigger), and Koji Kondo (The Legend of Zelda). The blog has continued with at least one posting each weekday—here are a few interesting tidbits we've learned so far: two new items, the Gooey Bomb and the Cracker Launcher, will be available; a secret skill called Final Smash can be performed once you obtain a Smash Ball, and its effect is different for each character; Pit can achieve limited flight using his Wings of Icarus move, and control the trajectory of arrows he fires. There's much more to come, as the site will continue to be updated all the way up to the game's release with information like new game modes and character reveals. It's a real treat for Smash fans. We recommend setting up an RSS feed to keep up with the outpouring of goodies. —Andy M.



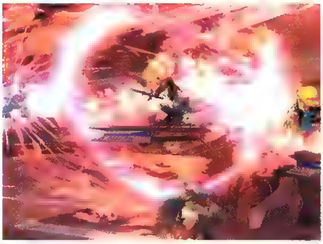
Many stages will transform throughout a fight. Battlefield, for instance, will change from night to day.



A Gooey Bomb will stick to an opponent, then explode unless it's passed on to someone else first.



Projectile weapons both old and new can now be fired while on the move!



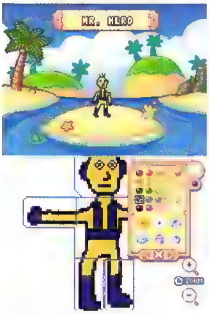
Every character's Final Smash move will be different. Mario's is called the Mario Finale.

[illegible]

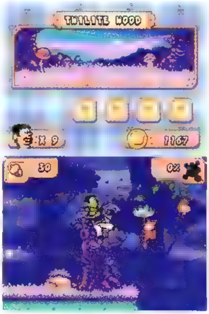
Art Appreciation

You don't just play THQ's Drawn to Life; you also help create it. Put your artistic talents to use in this thoroughly original DS platformer.

The debate among intellectual gamers has raged for years—are video games art? THQ puts a resounding end to the argument with Drawn to Life, a DS-exclusive platformer in which burgeoning artists get to actually draw their own characters, weapons, items, vehicles, and much more using the touch screen. With tools like templates, stamps, and unlockable color palettes at your disposal, your creations are limited only by your imagination; you'll even be able to share them with friends over a wireless connection. Once you've drawn your hero, you'll run, jump, swim, and fight through more than 50 stages (including boss battles) in four worlds as you attempt to save a village from creatures of darkness. Developed by 5th Cell, Drawn to Life should hit stores in September. —Chris H.



First you draw your own hero using the DS's touch screen . . .

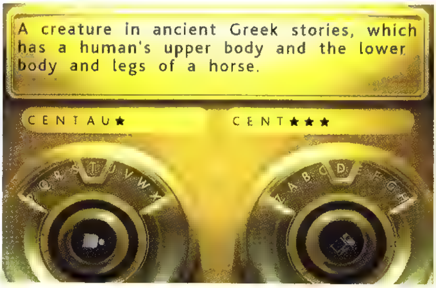


. . .then you take him through four worlds of platforming action.

My Word! You Talk Purty.

Ubisoft and a McGill University linguist have teamed up to fix your crappy communication skills.

Do you long to enter the exciting and lucrative world of the professional wordsmith? Do you hunger for acceptance in the literary salons of your suburb? With the help of Ubisoft's new self-improvement software for Wii and DS, My Word Coach, you'll soon be tossing off polysyllabic words like "polysyllabic" and impressing people in marketing meetings by saying "utilize" instead of "use." Ubisoft's Montreal game studio and McGill University linguist Dr. Tom Cobb have created a series of exercises designed to improve your verbal communication skills and reward your progress if you stick with the program. As you might expect, you'll make extensive use of either the Wii remote or the DS touch screen to scribble out your answers, depending on the version of the game you play. Dr. Cobb doesn't actually appear onscreen—unlike a certain Japanese neuroscientist in another self-improvement game—but you won't hurt for pedagogic inspiration: four cartoon coaches will guide you through 11 different exercises that draw on the game's 15,000-word dictionary. Ubisoft insists that the game will challenge people of all skill levels, so be sure to pick up a copy for the loquacious raconteur in your life. **Drew W.**

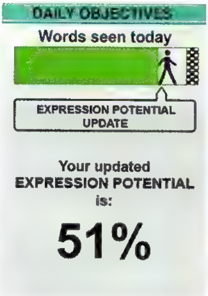


A creature in ancient Greek stories, which has a human's upper body and the lower body and legs of a horse.

CENTAU★

CENT★★★

The stupid computer is actually spelling "century," so the guy playing the game has plenty of time.



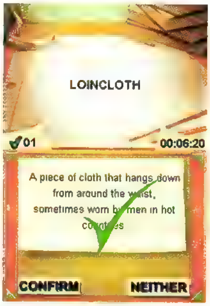
DAILY OBJECTIVES

Words seen today

EXPRESSION POTENTIAL UPDATE

Your updated EXPRESSION POTENTIAL is:

51%



LOINCLOTH

✓01 00:06:20

A piece of cloth that hangs down from around the waist, sometimes worn by men in hot countries

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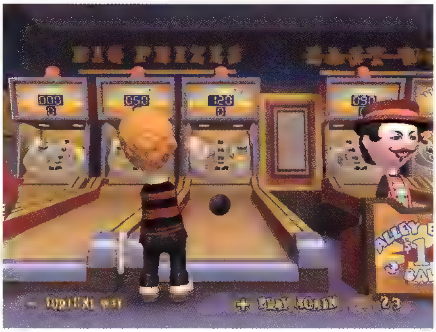
Step Right Up, Folks

Experience the fun of 35 attractions in Global Star's Carnival Games for Wii. Cotton candy, caramel corn, and annoying barkers not included.



Everyone remembers the carnival. Play some games, earn some tickets, win some prizes, and hopefully have a lot of fun in the process. This August, publisher Global Star Software and developer Cat Daddy Games are bringing that familiar style of fun to Wii with Carnival Games. Similar to Wii Play, but with a carnival twist, Carnival Games features a plethora of family-friendly activities that take advantage of a wide range of uses for the Wii remote. Twenty games are available from the outset—including favorites like skee-ball, a dunk tank, a shooting gallery, and a test of strength—with 15 more bonus games, such as a fortuneteller and a Whack-a-Mole-style attraction. You earn tickets for every game you play, and use them to obtain prizes, including a variety of character-customizing accessories. Up to four players will be able to join in the fun. —Chris H.

SABER METRICS

A Legacy in LEGO

Grab your plastic dual-bladed light saber and plop down on your X-Wing-shaped couch: The force lives on in LEGO *Star Wars*: The Complete Saga.

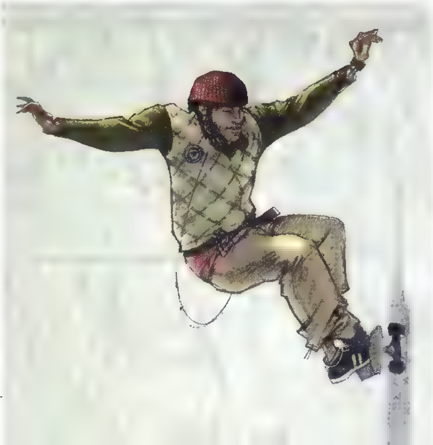
The gang's all here—the whiny kid, the hotshot pilot, the big furry guy, the little furry guys, the hot princess, the dirty traitor, the whiny robot, and the heroic trash can.

Lucas Arts has announced the next chapter in the LEGO *Star Wars* series for Wii and DS. LEGO *Star Wars*: The Complete Saga combines all of the levels from the first two installments of the LEGO *Star Wars* franchise, which means levels representing all six movies will be included. The Complete Saga is more than just a compilation, however; new characters, redesigned levels, and new challenges extend the experience well beyond the original games. There's even a behind-the-scenes video showing the creative process behind the LEGO *Star Wars* games. In addition to all the new content, The Wii version implements motion-sensitive gestures for controlling the characters. And the DS version has been rebuilt from the ground up, with an emphasis on touch-screen gameplay. Look for The Complete Saga in November. —Chris S.

[illegible]

Something to Prove

Tony Hawk drops onto Wii and DS with Tony Hawk's Proving Ground, a new flatland skating game from Activision.



After tearing up the ruins of Machu Picchu and the steep streets of San Francisco in Downhill Jam, Tony Hawk is finally returning to level ground later this year in Tony Hawk's Proving Ground. Under development by Page 44 Studios, the Wii title places an emphasis on various skating styles, and how you skate will affect the story directly. Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, D.C. are just a few of the locales where you'll be able to demonstrate your skills at vert, flatland tricks, and grinding. Proving Ground looks to expand on the Nail the Trick gameplay mechanic introduced in Tony Hawk's Project 8 by adding Nail the Grab and Nail the Manual maneuvers into the mix. In addition, you'll be able to create and customize skate videos of your best runs with a full-featured video editor. A DS version is also currently in development by Vicarious Visions. —Chris S.

GAME WATCH FORECAST

With only a handful of minor releases remaining for the GameCube and GBA, we've decided to finally retire those platforms from the forecast to make room for the oncoming flood of Wii and DS titles.

Announced
In Development
Ready for Release

Game Title Publisher ●●●
Game Title Publisher ●●● —New games added to the list

Wii

Game Title	Publisher	Status
Agatha Christie: And Then There Were None	The Adventure Company	●●
Alien Syndrome	Sega	●●○
Battalion Wars 2	Nintendo	●●
Ben 10: Protector of Earth	D3pa	●
Big Brain Academy: Wii Degree	Nintendo	●●
The Bigs	2K Sports	●●●
Blitz: The League	Midway	●●
Boogie	Electronic Arts	●●○
Brain Age 2: More Training in Minutes a Day	Nintendo	●●
Brothers in Arms Double Time	Ubisoft	●●○
Brunswick Pro Bowling	Crave	●●○
Carnival Games	Global Star	●●
Code Lyoko	The Game Factory	●●○
Cosmic Family	Ubisoft	●●○
Counter Force	Conspiracy	●●○
Crash of the Titans	Sierra	●●○
Dance Dance Revolution Hottest Party	Konami	●●○
Dave Mirra BMX Challenge	Crave	●●○
Destiny of Zorro	TBD	●●○
Dewy's Adventure	Konami	●●○
Disaster: Day of Crisis	Nintendo	●●○
Dragon Quest Swords: The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors	Square Enix	●●○
Driver: Parallel Lines	Ubisoft	●●
EA Playground	Electronic Arts	●●○
Emergency Mayhem	Codemasters	●●
Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer	2K Games	●●●
Ferrari Challenge	System 3	●○○
FIFA 08	Electronic Arts	●●○
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: The Crystal Bearers	Square Enix	●●○
Fire Emblem*	Nintendo	●●○
Geometry Wars: Galaxies	Sierra	●●
Ghost Squad	Sega	●●
Godzilla: Unleashed	Atari	●●
The Golden Compass	Sega	●○○
Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix	Electronic Arts	●●●
Harvest Moon Wii*	Natsume	●●○
Legends of the Indy 500	Destineer	●●○
LEGO Batman: The Videogame	Warner Bros. Interactive	●○○
LEGO Star Wars: The Complete Saga	LucasArts	●●
Line Rider	inXile	●○○
Looney Tunes: Acme Arsenal	Warner Bros. Interactive	●●○
Madden NFL 08	Electronic Arts	●●○
Manhunt 2	Rockstar	●●○
Mario Strikers Charged	Nintendo	●●○
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games	Sega	●●○
Metroid Prime 3: Corruption	Nintendo	●●
MySims	Electronic Arts	●●
My Word Coach	Ubisoft	●●
Namco Museum Remix	Namco Bandai	●●
Naruto: Clash of Ninja Revolution	D3PA/Tomy	●●
NBA Live 08	Electronic Arts	●●
Need for Speed ProStreet	Electronic Arts	●●
NiGHTS: Journey of Dreams	Sega	●●
Ninjabread Man	Conspiracy	●●
One Piece: Unlimited Adventure	Namco Bandai	●●
Opoona	Koei	●●
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection	Crave	●●
Pokemon Battle Revolution	Nintendo	●●●
Project H.A.M.M.E.R.	Nintendo	●●
Ratatouille	THQ	●●●
Rayman Raving Rabbids 2	Ubisoft	●●
Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition	Capcom	●●●
Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles	Capcom	●●
Samurai Slash*	Koei	●●
Scarface: The World Is Yours	Sierra	●●●
The Sims 2: Pets	Electronic Arts	●●●
Soulcalibur Legends	Namco Bandai	●●
Space Station Tycoon	Namco Bandai	●●
Super Mario Galaxy	Nintendo	●●
Super Smash Bros. Brawl	Nintendo	●●
Tomb Raider: Anniversary	Eidos	●●
Tony Hawk's Proving Ground	Activision	●●
Transformers: The Game	Activision	●●●
World Championship Poker: All In	Crave	●●
WWE SmackDown vs Raw 2008	THQ	●●
Zack & Wiki: Quest for Barbaros' Treasure	Capcom	●●

NINTENDO DS

Game Title	Publisher	Status
B-17: Fortress in the Sky	Destination	●
Ben 10: Protector of Earth	D3PA	●
Biker Mice from Mars	The Game Factory	●○
Bratz Ponyz	The Game Factory	●●
Brothers in Arms DS	Ubisoft	●●●
Build a Bear	The Game Factory	●●
California Games	System 3	●●
Cameltry	TBA	●●
Chibi-Robo: Park Patrol	Nintendo	●●
Chicken Shoot	Destination	●●
Chronos Twin	Lexicon	●●
Contra 4	Konami	●●
Crash of the Titans	Sierra	●●
Deal or No Deal	Destination	●●
Digimon World: Dawn	Namco Bandai	●●
Digimon World: Dusk	Namco Bandai	●●
DK: Jungle Climber	Nintendo	●●
Dragon Quest IX*	Square Enix	●●
Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker	Square Enix	●●
Drake & Josh	THQ	●
Drawn to Life	THQ	●●
DS Air*	Nintendo	●●
Dynasty Warriors DS: Fighter's Battle	Koei	●●
Europa Universalis II	Pocket PC	●●
Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer	2K Games	●●●
Ferrari Challenge	System 3	●
Final Fantasy IV	Square Enix	●●
Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings	Square Enix	●●
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates	Square Enix	●●
Final Fantasy Tactics A2	Square Enix	●●
Flipper Critters	Ignition	●●●
Front Mission	Square Enix	●●
Fullmetal Alchemist Trading Card Game	Destineer	●●
Garfield's Nightmare	The Game Factory	●●
Geometry Wars: Galaxies	Sierra	●●
Glory Days 2: Brotherhood of Men	Eidos	●●●
Godzilla Unleashed	Atari	●●
The Golden Compass	Sega	●
GoPets	Konami	●●
Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix	Electronic Arts	●●●
Heroes of Mana	Square Enix	●●
Hoshigami Remix	Aksys	●●●
Impossible Mission	System 3	●●
Indiana Jones 2007*	LucasArts	●
It's a Wonderful World	Square Enix	●●
Jam Sessions	Ubisoft	●●
Legend of the River King	Natsume	●
The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass	Nintendo	●●○
Legends of the Indy 500	Destineer	●●
Line Rider	inXile	●○
Looney Tunes: Duck Amuck	Warner Bros. Interactive	●●
Luminous Arc	Atlus	●●
Mega Man Star Force	Capcom	●●
Mega Man ZX Advent	Capcom	●●
My Word Coach	Ubisoft	●●
MySims	Electronic Arts	●●
Namco Museum DS	Namco Bandai	●●
Nanostray 2	TBD	●●○
Naruto: Path of the Ninja	D3PA/Tomy	●
Need for Speed ProStreet	Electronic Arts	●●
Nervous Brickdown	Eidos	●●
Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword	Tecmo	●●
Original Frisbee Disc Sports: Ultimate & Golf	Destination	●●
Panzer Tactics DS*	CDV Software	●●○
Pet Alien	The Game Factory	●●
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Trials and Tribulations	Capcom	●●
Picross DS	Nintendo	●●
Puzzle de Harvest Moon	Natsume	●●
Race Driver	Codemasters	●●
Ratatouille	THQ	●●●
Rune Factory: A Fantasy Harvest Moon	Natsume	●●
SimCity DS	Electronic Arts	●●●
Sonic Rush Adventure	Sega	●●
Spy-Q	Eidos	●●
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	LucasArts	●
Tony Hawk's Proving Ground	Activision	●●
Touchmaster	Midway	●●
Transformers: Autobots	Activision	●●
Transformers: Decepticons	Activision	●●
Turn it Around	Majesco	●●
Ultimate Brain Games	Telegames	●●
Ultimate Card Games	Telegames	●●
Undercover: Dual Motives	Anaconda	●
Worms: Open Warfare 2	THQ	●●
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2008	THQ	●●
Zendoku	Eidos	●●●
Zoey 101	THQ	●

*Tentative title

Hit the Streets

EA revs up a new Need for Speed on Wii and DS.

Electronic Arts announced that the latest version of its prolific Need for Speed franchise will hit Wii and DS this fall. Entitled Need for Speed ProStreet, the game is under development at EA Black Box, and steers the series in a new direction with a focus on head-to-head street racing. Another big change is that you'll have the opportunity to customize not only your car's appearance, but also its performance.

Samus Gets a Date

Corruption to be unleashed this summer.

Originally slated to be a Wii launch title, Metroid Prime 3: Corruption will finally hit store shelves on August 20. In next month's issue, we'll have the full scoop on what the extra development time has meant for this hotly anticipated adventure.

Boarding School

Big Brain Academy gets home-schooled

For all you mathletes out there, University Games is bringing out a Big Brain Academy board game this summer. Expect challenges that stump players just as thoroughly, and enjoyably as their video game counterparts.

Wii Channels

Takin' It to the Street Fighter

It was tough to decide on a featured pick this month—there's no shortage of classics in the new crop of games. In the end, Chun Li broke our will with a kick to the groin.

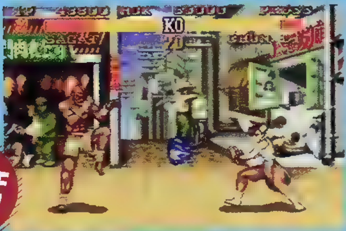
VIRTUAL CONSOLE

WHAT'S NEW IN RETRO GAMING!

21 Games

STAFF PICK!

STREET FIGHTER II TURBO



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GIANCARLO'S PICK

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AIR ZONK

Platform: TurboGrafx16
Publisher: Hudson
Genre: Shooter
Original Release: 1992

WHAT: A side-scrolling shooter starring Zonk, a sunglasses-wearing, lightning-bolt-emblazoned cybernetic version of Bonk, the lovable caveman from Bonk's Adventure.

WHY: You've beaten Ordyne in every possible way, and now you want to play another cute, side-scrolling shooter. —DW

BLAZING LAZERS

STAFF PICK!

Platform: TurboGrafx16
Publisher: Hudson
Genre: Shooter
Original Release: 1989

WHAT: This vertically scrolling shooter for the TurboGrafx features loads of outer-space action and eight explosive power-ups, including an electric blast and homing missiles.

WHY: Soothe your itchy trigger finger with another addition to Virtual Console's list of excellent shooters. —CH

STAFF PICK!

ACT
PLAYER
TIME
SCORE

ACTRAISER

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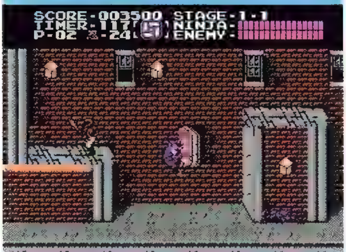
CHRIS H.'S PICK

[illegible]

VIRTUAL CONSOLE SPOTLIGHT

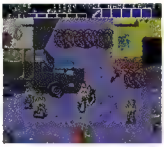


NINJA GAIDEN

Andy M.'s Pick

Platform: NES
Publisher: Techmo
Genre: Action
Original Release: 1989

These days, every other console game has something to do with ninjas, but Ninja Gaiden set the standard with its responsive fighting mechanics and majestic cut-scenes. The story, which involves a ninja named Ryu Hayabusa who sets off to America to avenge his father, may seem primitive by today's standards, but it was nothing short of groundbreaking in the 8-bit era. If you're planning to check out the upcoming DS title, you owe it to yourself to play the game that started it all.

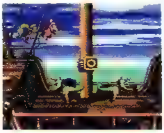


BLOODY WOLF

Platform: TurboGrafx16
Publisher: Hudson
Genre: Action
Original Release: 1990

WHAT: Machine guns, combat knives, hand grenades, bazookas, and more are at your disposal in this 3/4-overhead-perspective military shoot-'em-up.

WHY: Can't wait for the new *Rambo* movie? Prepare yourself with some old-school POW-rescuing action. —CH

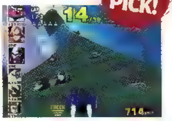


DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2: DIDDY'S KONG QUEST

Platform: Super NES
Publisher: Nintendo
Genre: Platformer
Original Release: 1995

WHAT: Rare's CG-rendered sequel sent Diddy and his girlfriend, Dixie, on a mission to rescue Donkey Kong.

WHY: You can argue about whether Donkey Kong Country 2 was better than the original, but there's no question it was one of the biggest platformers of its day. —CH

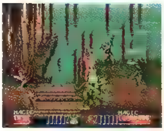


F-ZERO X

Platform: N64
Publisher: Nintendo
Genre: Racing
Original Release: 1998

WHAT: Captain Falcon and assorted weirdos hop into hovering vehicles to tear across elevated race tracks at 60 frames per second.

WHY: Because when people race in the future, they will do it to strains of well-nigh intolerable butt rock. Also, the series graduated from Mode 7 fake 3-D with this polygonal wonder. —DW

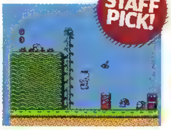


GOLDEN AXE II

Platform: Sega Genesis
Publisher: Sega
Genre: Action
Original Release: 1991

WHAT: After the success of the arcade-to-Genesis port of the original Golden Axe, Sega followed up with this 16-bit hack-and-slash sequel.

WHY: If you're desperate for more fantasy combat but don't care about the quality. The action isn't as precise as it is in the original, and the sound is poor. —CH

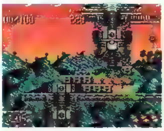


SUPER MARIO BROS. 2

Platform: NES
Publisher: Nintendo
Genre: Platformer
Original Release: 1988

WHAT: The first SMB sequel wasn't a true Mario game—it originally starred different characters in Japan—but it features lots of platforming fun and four playable heroes.

WHY: Despite the game's strange origins, it's a blast. Tossing foes is a great gameplay mechanic that does the Mario name proud. —CH



SUPER TURRICAN

Platform: Super NES
Publisher: Seika
Genre: Action
Original Release: 1993

WHAT: A scrolling sci-fi action/platformer featuring cool weapons, precision control and nice graphics, ST was developed by Factor 5, who went on to create the Rogue Squadron games.

WHY: Freedom to roam, freedom to blast aliens, freedom to get blasted by aliens and start all over again. —SP

VIRTUAL CONSOLE: ALSO THIS MONTH

Because of the large group of games in the pipeline for release this month, we've opted to include some of the Virtual Console titles in a list. If you are a huge fan of Donkey Kong Jr. Math or J.J. & Jeff, please accept our sincere apologies.

NES

TITLE	VC PUBLISHER	GENRE	ORIGINAL RELEASE
Donkey Kong Jr. Math	Nintendo	Educational	1985
Lode Runner	Hudson	Action/Puzzle	1987
Mach Rider	Nintendo	Racing	1985
Milon's Secret Castle	Hudson	Action/Puzzle	1988
NES Open Tournament Golf	Nintendo	Sports	1991

GENESIS

TITLE	VC PUBLISHER	GENRE	ORIGINAL RELEASE
Ecco: The Tides of Time	Sega	Adventure	1994
Kid Chameleon	Sega	Platformer	1992

TURBOGRAFX16

TITLE	VC PUBLISHER	GENRE	ORIGINAL RELEASE
Dead Moon	Hudson	Shooter	1991
J.J. & Jeff	Hudson	Action	1990
World Sports Competition	Hudson	Sports	1992

Do you prefer the playground or the insane asylum? It's all possible on Wii.

Battalion Wars II Pg. 24
Boogie Pg. 30
DK Jungle Climber Pg. 28
Driver: Parallel Lines Pg. 26
EA Playground Pg. 30
Luminous Arc Pg. 25
Manhunt 2 Pg. 32
Naruto: Clash of Ninja Revolution Pg. 27
Nervous Brickdown Pg. 31
Pet Alien Pg. 31
Picross DS Pg. 28
Sonic Rush Adventure Pg. 26

Back to the Trenches

>BATTALION WARS II

PLATFORM: Wii • PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Kuju • RELEASE: September 2007

Following up on the critically well-received action title for GameCube, Battalion Wars II returns to the fray on Wii. Building on its Advance Wars roots, Battalion Wars II blends seamlessly the shooter and tactics genres; the result is more akin to playing with a handful of army men than to leading a squad in a game like Rainbow Six.

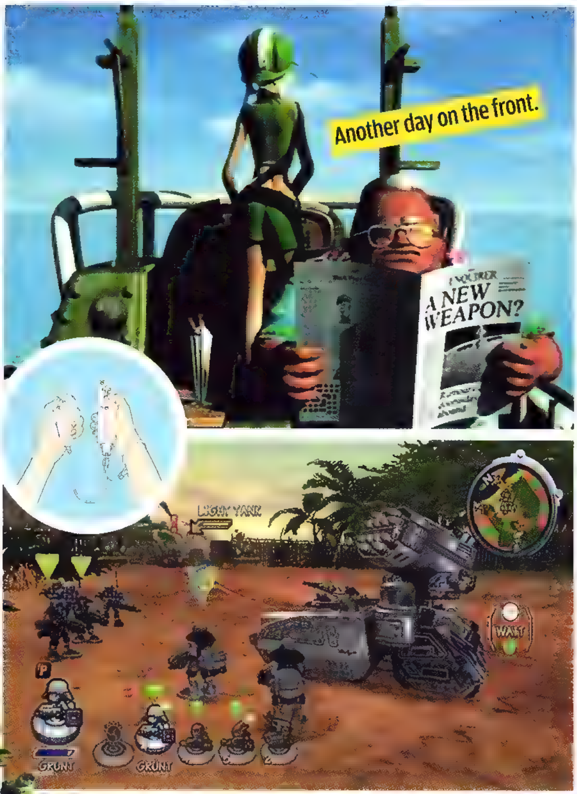
Whereas the first Battalion Wars was more of a straightforward military account, the sequel adds a supernatural twist to the story. The game opens with a brief introductory level that features a host of mythical, orc-like characters and a tale of a strange, all-powerful weapon. When you fast-forward to the future, you learn about six military factions vying for some sort of special weapon, but nobody quite knows what it is or how it works. Expect a ton of plot twists as the story unfolds through the eyes of the various commanders.

The Wii feels purpose-built for a game like Battalion Wars II: You control your character by using the Control Stick, and you use the remote to aim at your enemies. You also use the remote to tell your troops at which foes they should target their fire. You don't play as a specific main character; instead you can swap members of your force on the fly by pointing and clicking on the units. You can even swap troops with vehicles. Depending on the unit or vehicle type, you can perform motion-sensitive maneuvers; for example, as a foot soldier, you can roll out of the way of enemy fire with a quick shake of the nunchuk.

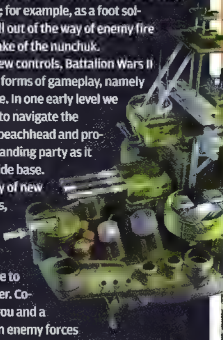
Beyond the new controls, Battalion Wars II also introduces forms of gameplay, namely nautical warfare. In one early level we played, we had to navigate the waters along a beachhead and provide cover to a landing party as it stormed a seaside base. There are plenty of new types of soldiers, vehicles, and aircraft to control, too.

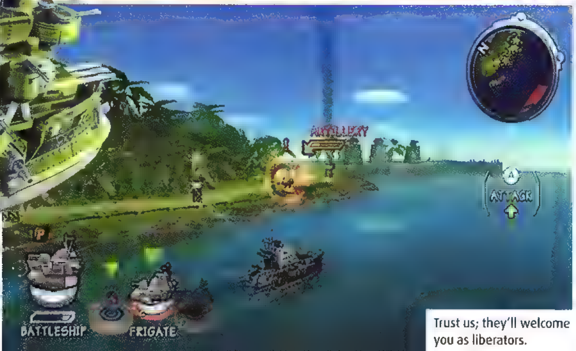
You don't have to go it alone, either. Co-op play allows you and a friend to take on enemy forces together or go head-to-head in a variety of multiplayer modes.

Battalion Wars II is slated for deployment to the front this September. —Chris S.



Another day on the front.





Trust us; they'll welcome you as liberators.

Tactical Advantage

>LUMINOUS ARC

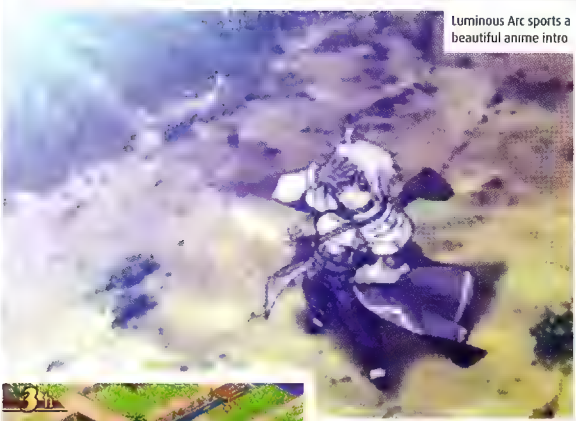
PLATFORM: DS • PUBLISHER: ATLUS
DEVELOPER: IMAGE EPOCH/MARVELOUS
RELEASE: AUGUST 2007

The DS is quickly becoming the go-to system for strategy-RPGs. Aksys Games' Hoshigami Remix is coming soon (see our review on page 97), Square Enix's FINAL FANTASY Tactics A2 is arriving somewhere down the road (check out the Square Enix feature starting on page 58), and in between, gamers can treat themselves to Atlus's Luminous Arc. Luminous Arc doesn't break a lot of ground in its genre, but from what we've seen so far, the game follows its established formula very well.

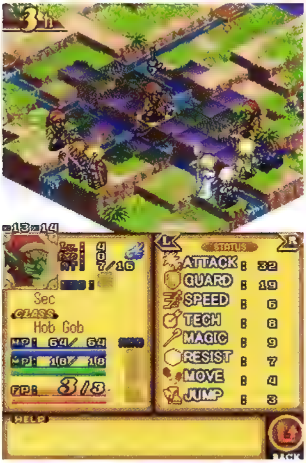
Set in the world of Shtraberl, Luminous Arc tells the story of a young hero named Alph and his elite fighting-force comrades. Alph and his friends—collectively known as the Garden Children—have been raised since childhood by the Luminous Church to combat the menace of evildoing witches. According to legend, witches were responsible for nearly destroying the world 1,000 years previous in an event called the Adelheid Disaster, and have recently reappeared to cause trouble, even as the church's deity is prophesized to return and usher in a new age of prosperity. Of course, not everything is as it seems; the truth behind the events slowly comes to light as the Garden Children set out to eradicate the witches and retrieve powerful magic stones called Lapistier.

While the story unfolds through numerous cutscenes (featuring fantastic character designs and an abundance of voicework), the bulk of the game consists of isometric-perspective turn-based strategy battles. If you're familiar with other tactical RPGs, you'll know what to expect here; you enter battle with a diverse cast of characters (swordsmen, archers, healers, etc.), move your troops into position (as determined by each character's range), then take on your foes with an array of physical attacks, spells, skills, items, and more. As characters perform actions in battle, their Flash Drive gauges increase, allowing them to pull off superpowerful attacks, including double-team Synergy maneuvers. You can fight using either traditional or touch-screen controls (available in both right- and left-handed configurations).

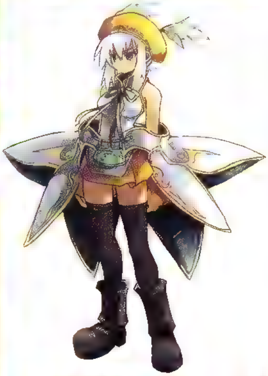
When you're not in combat, you can journey point-to-point on the world map, visit shops to purchase new equipment, and converse with your comrades to flesh out the game's story. You'll also get to speak to one of your allies after each battle; by making correct dialogue choices you can boost your friendship, which causes your companion to give you gifts and increase your cooperation during fights. Throw in an excellent soundtrack produced by Yasunori Mitsuda (best known for the music of Chrono Trigger and Xenogears), and you have a strategy-RPG that could be one of the best yet seen on a handheld system. —CHRIS H.

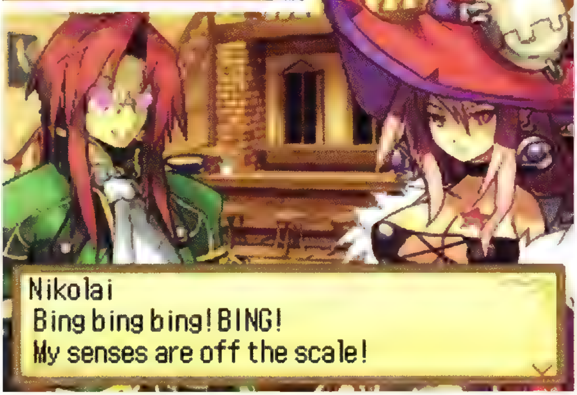


Luminous Arc sports a beautiful anime intro



13 14
Lv. 4
EXP 8
AT 7/16
Sec
CLASS
Hob Gob
HP: 64/ 64
MP: 18/ 18
FP: 3/8
STATUS
ATTACK : 32
GUARD : 19
SPEED : 6
TECH : 8
MAGIC : 9
RESIST : 7
MOVE : 4
JUMP : 3
HELP
BACK





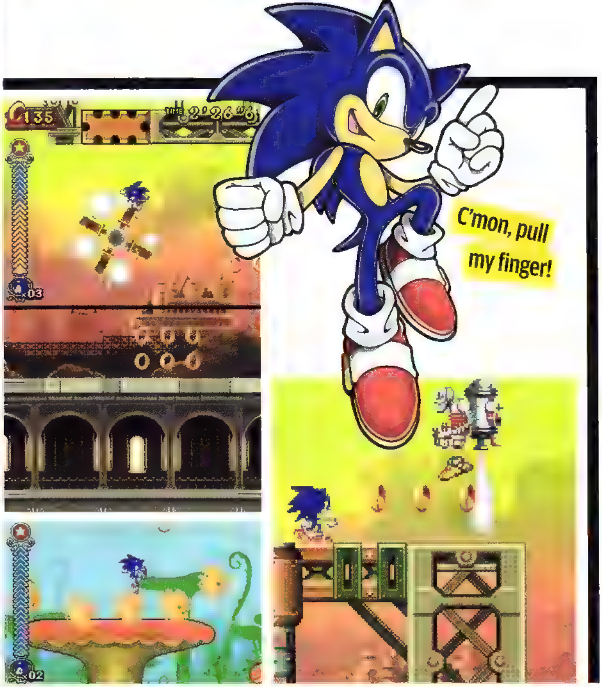
Nikolai
Bing bing bing! BING!
My senses are off the scale!

Rushin' Attack

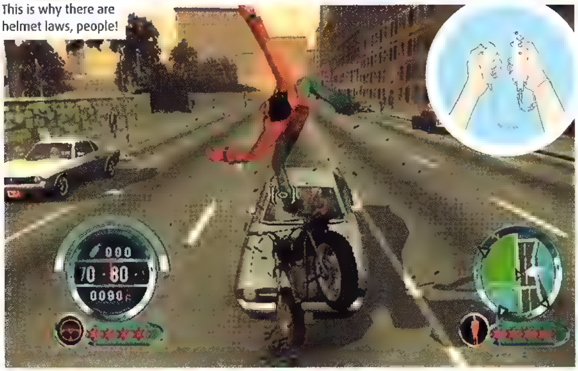
>SONIC RUSH ADVENTURE

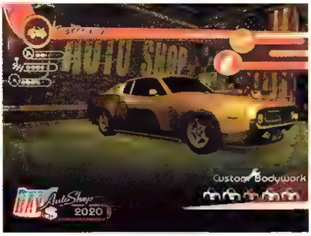
PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **SEGA** • RELEASE: **FALL 2007**

If you think Sega's messing with the formula that made Sonic Rush such a blast to play, don't worry. All of the super-fast-paced 2-D action from the original game remains intact and just as crazy as ever. Like the previous game, Sonic moves at breakneck speeds through a variety of environments, ranging from a tranquil giant mushroom forest to a more industrialized area reminiscent of the Oil Ocean Zone from Sonic the Hedgehog 2. They're all incredibly vibrant and the subtle 3-D effects make them even more visually appealing. However, there are some new not-so-subtle 3-D effects as well. Sonic Rush Adventure features entirely new fully 3-D environments, but Sonic won't be running around them in his traditional fleet-footed way. In these levels he rides one of several watercraft (constructed by Sonic's always-perky buddy, Tails) to travel between islands (which represent areas in the game) and collect more rings. Each island contains multiple sublevels that Sonic has to complete, but it's not a huge part of the game—the emphasis is still on high-speed Sonic action. —GIANCARLO V.


C'mon, pull my finger!

This is why there are helmet laws, people!





Drive Angry

>DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES

PLATFORM: **WII** • PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **REFLECTIONS INTERACTIVE** • RELEASE: **JULY 2007**

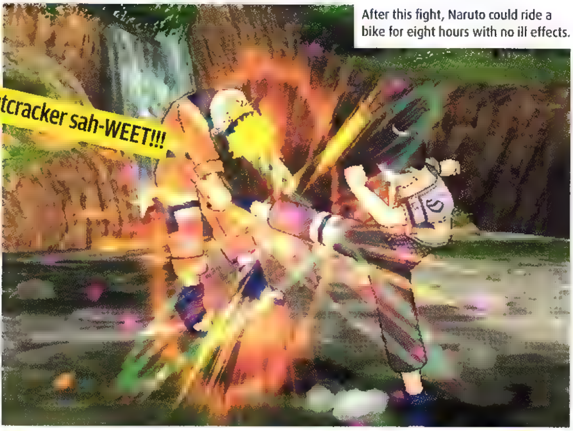
The Driver franchise (with the exception of the original PlayStation game) has always taken a backseat to other sprawling sandbox-style, crime-oriented games, such as Grand Theft Auto. But that hasn't stopped the team at Reflections Interactive from continually trying to push the envelope and introduce new features with each game in the series. The latest, Parallel Lines, is unique in that it spans two time periods, so you'll see vehicles and fashions that represent that fact. The first few missions in the game have you taking on the role of a wheelman in the 1970s, so most of the cars are of the muscle variety, but there are also buses, motorcycles, and speedy convertibles. Conversely, when you're in the later timeline (closer to the present day), you have access to more-modern vehicles. In either time period, vehicles are heavily customizable; you just stop into one of several garages scattered across a massive in-game version of New York City. The garages also help you warp to missions that range from racing to running errands for local crime lords. —GIANCARLO V.

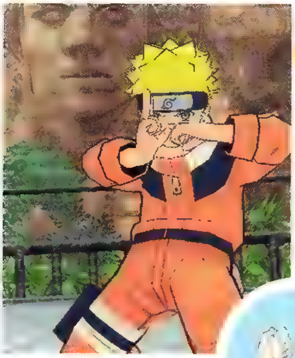
Kicky Good Extreme Ninja Action

>NARUTO: CLASH OF NINJA REVOLUTION

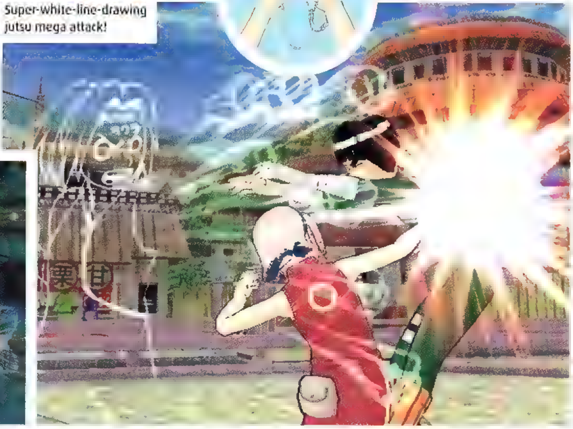
PLATFORM: Wii • PUBLISHER: Tomy/D3PA
DEVELOPER: Eighting • RELEASE: Fall 2007

The Clash of Ninja series will make a less-than-stealthy debut on the Wii this fall with its signature brand of flashy, anime-style fighting. Based on Naruto Shippuden: Gekitou Ninja Taisen EX, a popular Japanese fighting game for Wii, Clash of Ninja Revolution's storyline was adapted to reflect earlier events in the Naruto anime series, thus avoiding spoilers for American fans of the show (and manga). But an earlier storyline doesn't mean there's nothing new in the game—Tomy promises that Revolution will come fully loaded with exclusive goodies, including new characters, like murderous bad boy Itachi. Along with the new faces comes a pile of new animations, including elaborate, character-specific ninja jutsu attacks. Up to four players can brawl through six stages—each with two connected battle areas—using their pick of more than 14 playable characters. During a fight, opponents can pursue each other between the discrete battle areas while trading blows. The fighting itself will be familiar to fans of the Clash of Ninja series, but most of the basic moves are now mapped to the Wii remote—so expect to do plenty of waggling while you pummel the crap out of Sakura. The remote should also get a workout while you play three Wii-specific minigames: a shuriken-tossing light-gun-style game; Rasengan Training, which challenges you to spin the remote and unleash a timed attack; and Shadow Clone Jutsu, a game that requires you to locate the real Naruto as he stands amid a crowd of clones. More details on characters and gameplay are forthcoming, and we'll do our best to channel our preview jutsu into bringing you new info as it becomes available. —Drew W.


After this fight, Naruto could ride a bike for eight hours with no ill effects.



Vaseline-on-the-lens jutsu!!!


Super-white-line-drawing jutsu mega attack!

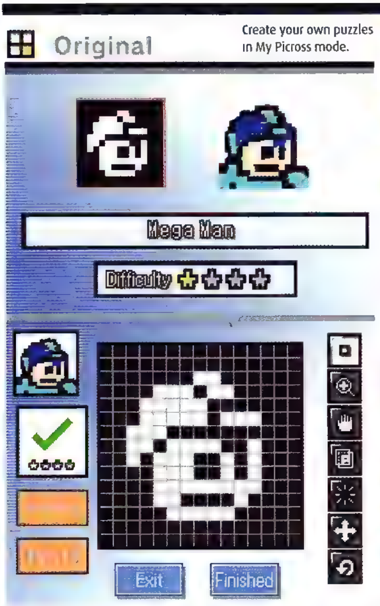
Way to let a pile of sand kick your butt, gimp!

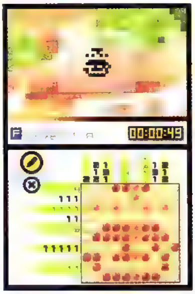
Picture This

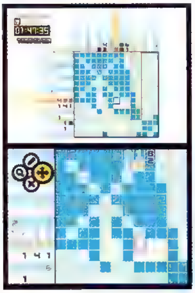
>PICROSS DS

PLATFORM: DS • PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: JUPITER • RELEASE: JULY 2007

Despite similarities in the titles, Picross has nothing to do with the giant robots of Macross. Nor does it have anything to do with lacrosse. On the other hand, Picross is a lot like Sudoku, insofar as both originated with pencils and paper, and both revolve around making marks on square grids to solve brain-bending puzzles. Instead of filling the grid with numbers, however, in Picross you use numerical clues around the edge of the grid to fill in squares and thus create pictures (such as letters, fruits, and animals). The basic concept might be simple, but the game can get pretty challenging, especially as you attempt more-complex images and larger grids (they range from super-simple 5x5 arrangements to 15x15 squares, in which you'll have to zoom in to complete the puzzle). In addition to more than 130 standard puzzles across three difficulty levels, the game includes Daily Picross (which lets you attempt to beat five consecutive puzzles with various restrictions as quick as you can), My Picross (which allows you to create your own puzzles and upload them to Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection), and multiplayer action for up to five players. If you need a little help, the game also features tutorial modes and a hint option. —CHRIS H.


Create your own puzzles in My Picross mode.



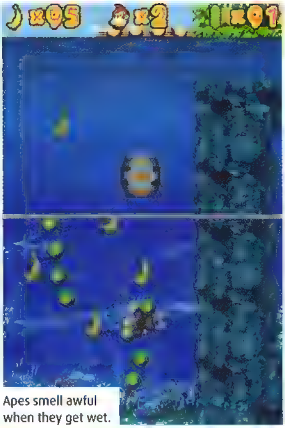


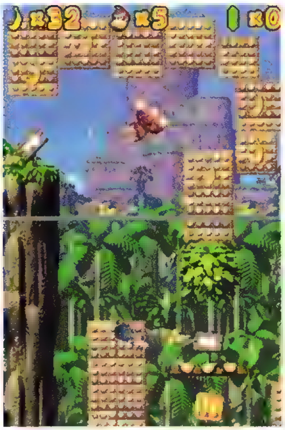
We've Got DK Pegged

>DK: JUNGLE CLIMBER

PLATFORM: DS • PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: PAON • RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 2007

Now that Donkey Kong has been well established as the King of Swing on the GBA, he's ready to scale to new heights on the dual screens of the DS. The same climbing mechanic from the GBA title—using the L and R Buttons to negotiate pegs—is firmly in place in the DS game, but the environments are now a lot bigger and prettier. DK and the Kong krew also sport an updated look that's more in line with their recent appearances on the DS and home consoles. In addition to the nice graphical face-lift, Jungle Climber will introduce some new level-design elements that should keep veteran swingers white-knuckled as DK dangles from his fingertips. For example, a giant sunflower offers more than just a climbing surface—if you hold on tight and let DK's weight bend the stem, you can fling yourself great distances and reach bananas suspended high in the air. You can also use your weight to roll giant wheels into prime positions for banana and coin collection. Once you're done throwing your weight around in the single-player game, Jungle Climber's single- and multicard multiplayer support should keep you hanging around for climbing races against your friends. —DREW W.


Apes smell awful when they get wet.



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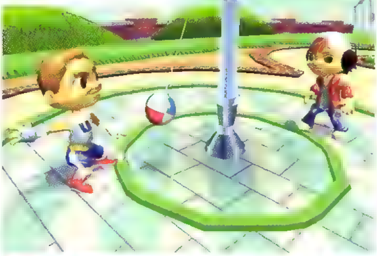
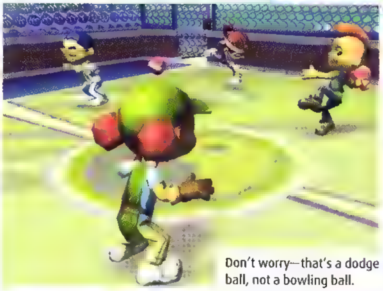
Unlike in *Napoleon Dynamite*, tetherball is a two-person affair.





Don't worry—that's a dodge ball, not a bowling ball.

Wii-cess Time!

>EA PLAYGROUND

PLATFORM: Wii (ALSO ON DS) • PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER: EA CANADA • RELEASE: FALL 2007

Not everyone has fond memories of hangin' out on the playground (was I the only one getting daily wedgies?), but EA thinks it's the perfect setting for a new multiplayer experience on Wii. You'll navigate through a dreamlike playground on which you'll meet characters, collect items, and, of course, play games. Most of the activities are of a physical nature, such as playing dodge ball—you'll throw, catch, and dodge balls by mimicking real-life movements with the Wii remote. Other activities will be more about precision. In one, you'll race RC cars around the playground, avoiding obstacles like a table or a person's leg. Every minigame will have a multiplayer mode and use only the Wii remote. (Sorry, kids—no playground boxing with the nunchuk.) While the game seems to be aimed at young players, EA insists that's just the setting. "It's about the simplicity of the idea, and the raw fun factor of being a kid," says executive producer Dave McCarthy. "It doesn't matter if you're five years old or fifty-five." —ANDY M.

Body Movin'

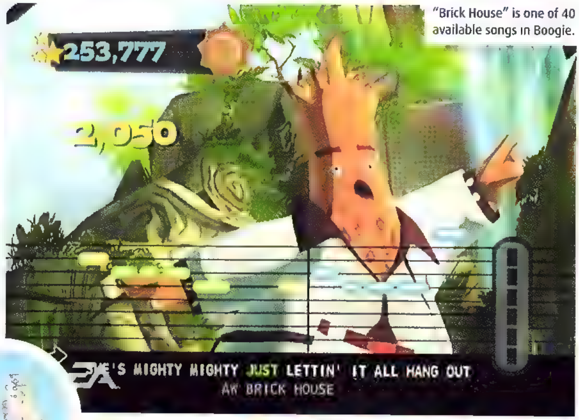
>BOOGIE

PLATFORM: Wii • PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER: EA MONTREAL • RELEASE: FALL 2007

Far from your typical dance party, Boogie is a new breed of game designed specifically around the gesture controls of the Wii remote and nunchuk. You'll twist, shake, and flick the controllers as a custom-built character dances in real time to your movements. The nunchuk controls your character's upper-body movements, while actions with the Wii remote trigger additional dance moves (such as the classic *Saturday Night Fever* pose). And there are numerous ways to add some sauce to your dancing: you can lip-sync, change your character's facial expression, or even move around the dance floor using the Control Pad on the remote. The thing that most distinctly sets Boogie apart from other dance games, though, is that you're never told what to do. You can dance however you want, and as long as you stay on beat and vary your moves, you'll earn points and succeed.

Tearing up the dance floor is only part of the experience. Boogie also offers a karaoke mode, which lets you sing along to classic tunes using a USB microphone peripheral (included with the game). EA promises a ton of multiplayer options as well, plus recording and editing tools that allow you to create music videos based on your performances. —ANDY M.

"Brick House" is one of 40 available songs in Boogie.

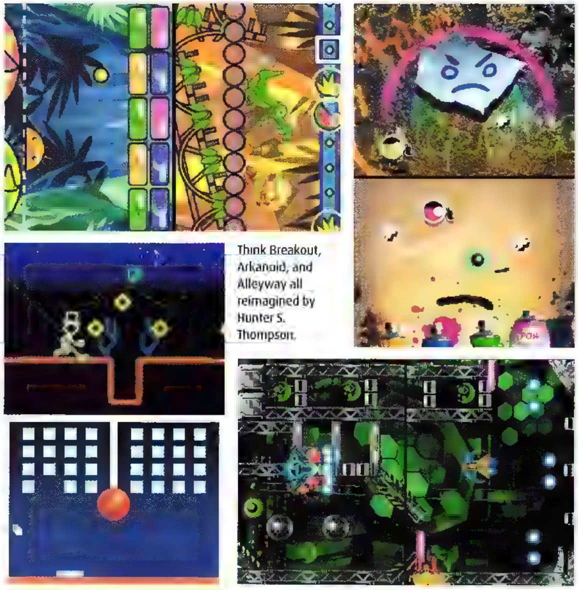


Hit the Bricks

>NERVOUS BRICKDOWN

PLATFORM: DS • PUBLISHER: EIDOS
DEVELOPER: ARKEDO STUDIO • RELEASE: JUNE 2007

Pick-up-and-play games have never been more popular, and interest in them only seems to be climbing. Which is very good news for Nervous Brickdown, a game that almost anyone can feel comfortable with from the start. Gameplay is simple: you control a paddle (a la air hockey) via the stylus, while repelling an ever-moving object around an insanely interactive environment. Despite what the title claims, you won't just be breaking your standard run-of-the-mill bricks—instead you'll be volleying shots at everything from dripping ink spots to monkeys, as well as discovering what funky power-ups you want to snag . . . or avoid. You'll also find a variety of levels in which you doodle your own paddle, pilot a submarine, or even control a laser-equipped spaceship—all of which make for an exciting time. Even with its pick-up-and-play appeal, Nervous Brickdown will hold interest for the most hard-core of gamers with 135 mettle-testing levels, as well as the inventive-while-challenging boss battles. A single-card multiplayer mode rounds out this promising title. —PETE M.



Think Breakout, Arkanoid, and Alleyway all reimagined by Hunter S. Thompson.

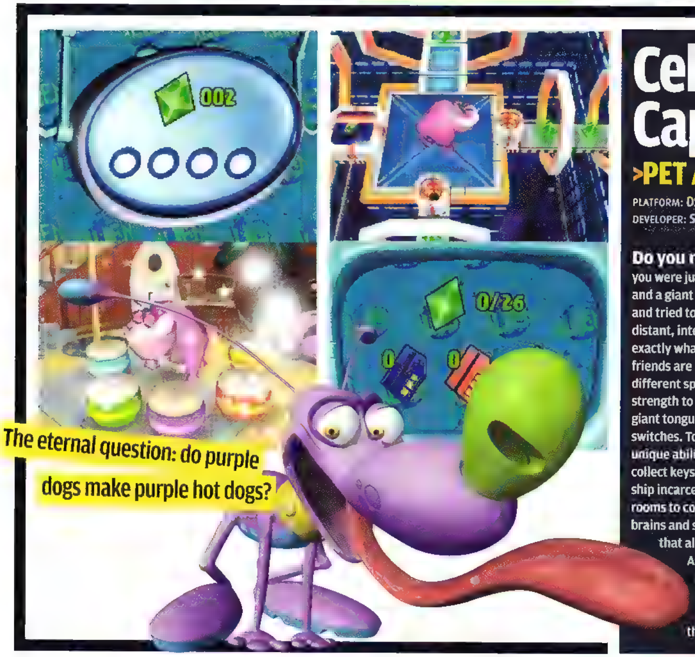
Celestial Captivity

>PET ALIEN

PLATFORM: DS • PUBLISHER: THE GAME FACTORY
DEVELOPER: SHIN'EN • RELEASE: AUGUST 2007

Do you remember that one time when you were just watchin' TV out in your lighthouse, and a giant UFO flew overhead, beamed you up, and tried to force you to become a new exhibit in a distant, intergalactic zoo? Good; then you'll know exactly what Pet Alien is about. You and your four friends are played by cartoony aliens, each with a different special skill—for example, one has the strength to smash large objects, another has a giant tongue that can lash out at distant items and switches. Together the five aliens must use their unique abilities to hit switches, push blocks, and collect keys to break out of their captors' spaceship incarceration. With over 80 puzzle-oriented rooms to complete, the aliens will have to use brains and speed to get out safely. But you knew that already, didn't you?

As you progress through the main adventure, you'll unlock touch-screen-based minigames. There's also an art gallery that expands as you progress through the adventure. —CHRIS S.



The eternal question: do purple dogs make purple hot dogs?

Voluntarily Committed

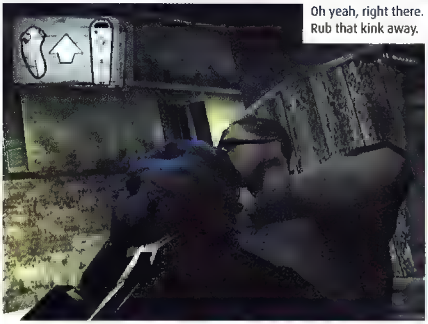
>MANHUNT 2

PLATFORM: Wii • PUBLISHER: ROCKSTAR GAMES
DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR LONDON • RELEASE: JULY 2007

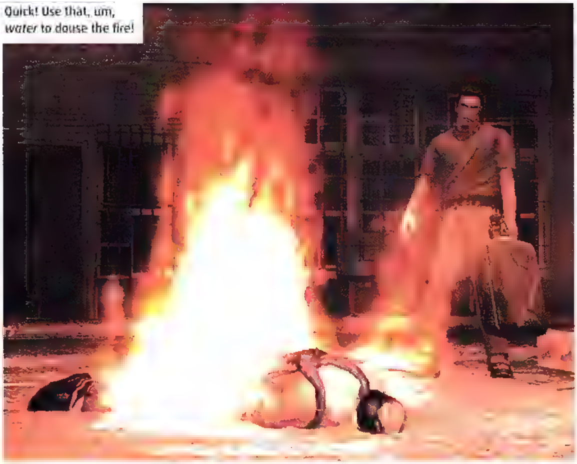
If you tire of Mario's happy world of primary colors and kidnapped princesses, allow us to introduce you to Danny Lamb, the protagonist of Rockstar's latest blood-drenched epic, Manhunt 2. Danny just woke up in a mental institution, and he's very, very upset. After an electrical storm knocked out the power, Danny and several dozen psychotic prisoners broke out of their cells and started roaming the dank halls of Dixmore Asylum. Danny doesn't have a warp pipe or a cloud he can ride to freedom, but he does have an ax . . . and a strong desire to use it on the hospital staff. Of course, *you'll* be the one wielding a Wii remote when Danny goes on his rampage, so you'd better have an interest in the horror genre and a stomach for gore if you plan on entering this bleak fantasy world.

Despite the "2" after the title, the new game's story has nothing to do with the PS2 hit Manhunt—a purposefully disturbing, game-show-style killing spree that took obvious inspiration from the novel and movie *The Running Man*. Manhunt 2 is actually more reminiscent of an *X-Files* episode or Christopher Nolan's cult favorite *Memento*. As Daniel Lamb makes his way—one corpse at a time—through the nightmarish adventure, he slowly learns that he was once a scientist who worked on a mysterious "Project" that involved weapons research. Stripped of his family, his freedom, and his memories, Lamb and fellow Dixmore/Project escapee Leo Caspar move from one creepy locale to the next in search of clues about their past. In addition to clues, they find a lot of dangerous Project agents who need to be dispatched with extreme prejudice.

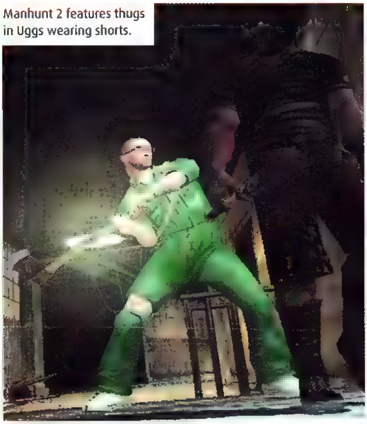
Knocking off bad guys in spectacular ways with various weapons/objects is the whole point of the game. You can fight the formidable enemies head-on, but you won't survive long if you fight like a man. The game design clearly favors the "execution" approach: you keep to the shadows, sneak up behind an intended victim, then unleash an attack that will really annoy the cleaning lady the next morning. If you successfully initiate an execution, you'll need to follow onscreen cues to move the Wii remote and nunchuk in ways that represent the grisly deed. Depending on how nervy you are in stalking your prey, you can ratchet up the gore factor to *Saw* and *Hostel* levels. Once you see what Danny can do with a pair of pruning shears, you'll understand that this M-rated game truly separates the men from the boys. —DREW W.



Oh yeah, right there. Rub that kink away.



Quick! Use that, um, *water* to douse the fire!



Manhunt 2 features thugs in Uggs wearing shorts.

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Soul Awakening

Gaming's most revered fighter is reborn as Wii-exclusive action-adventure Soulcalibur Legends. Welcome back to the stage of history.

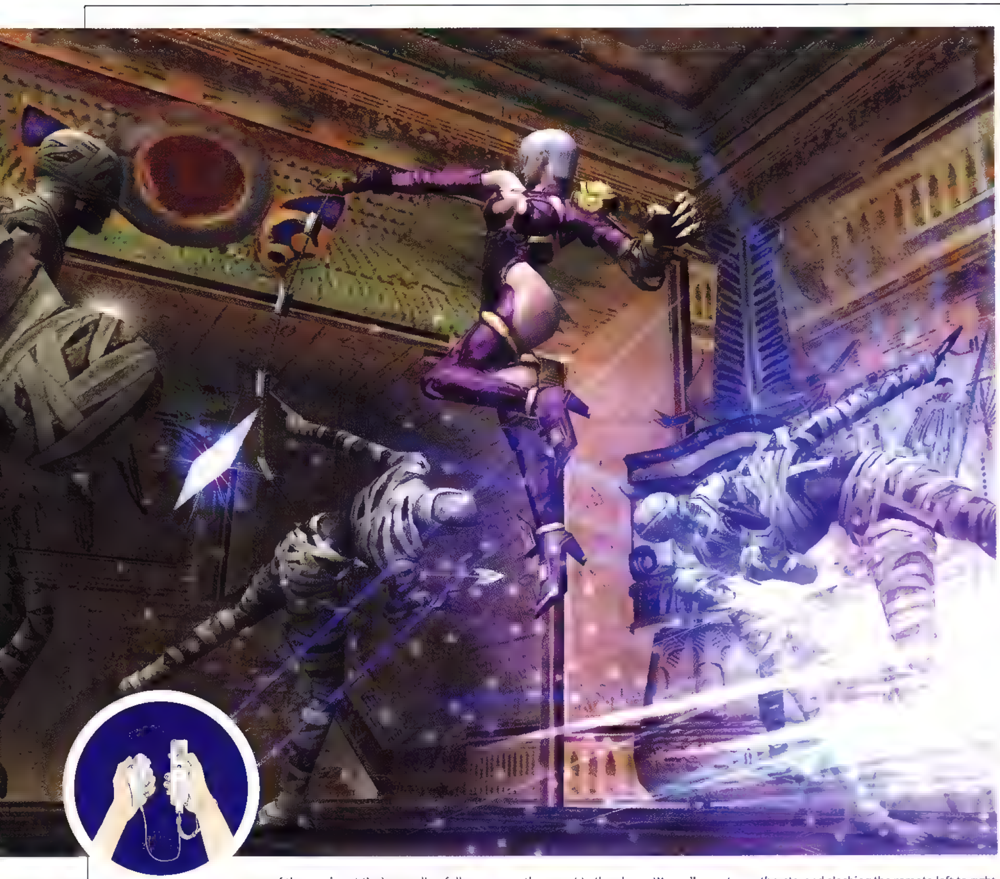
By Steve Thomason

For more than a decade, Soulcalibur has stood as the pinnacle of the one-on-one fighting genre. Finely tuned controls, beautifully flowing animation, and unparalleled depth of presentation have made it the standard against which all competitors are judged. But this winter the storied franchise will step into a new arena. "The team's been aware for some time that the fans have been requesting to see these Soulcalibur characters in a new light, and we've wanted to create a game in response to that request," says producer Jin Okubo. "In early 2006, we were finally able to put together a team and assemble all of the members that we needed to begin such a project." The result: Soulcalibur Legends, a third-person action adventure that offers a fresh take on the series' trademark combat.

Live by the Sword

Though a Wii exclusive, Soulcalibur Legends wasn't always destined for Nintendo's little white console. "When we first started thinking about how we were going to approach the development of the game, we weren't specifically looking at the Wii," recalls Okubo. "We were just putting together our ideas and trying to decide which direction we wanted to go. But soon after that, the Wii became quite a big topic and the team grew very interested in it. One of the reasons that we were drawn to the Wii in particular was because of its unique controller, and the fact that it's so accessible for a wide range of gamers. And since Soulcalibur is based around weapons, it just seemed obvious—the connection between holding a sword and holding the Wii remote." Yes, you'll brandish the remote as a weapon, swinging it to and fro to dispatch hordes of enemies. The thought of such a control scheme is one of the things that got everyone excited about the Wii in the first place, but previous games have tried it with disappointing results. Okubo and company are confident that they'll be the ones to finally realize the concept's potential. "The team spent a lot of time during the early stages focusing on how we wanted to approach the control," according to the producer. "We spent a great deal of time on how to reflect the movements of the characters most accurately through the remote. We wanted to make sure that it was physically satisfying—the act of slashing with the remote as if it were a sword. So we put a lot of effort into studying exactly how to represent that through the controller."

We had a chance to play an early version of the game, and that the swordplay already felt remarkably fluid and responsive should come as little surprise given the development team's pedigree. Okubo, who served as director on the second and third Soulcalibur games, is joined by a number of series veterans (including the lead game designer, lead animator, and art director for

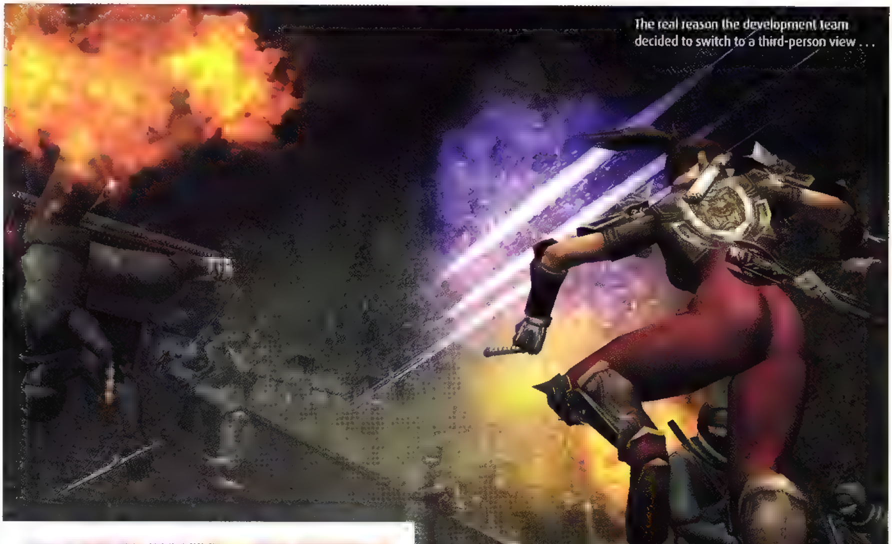


"Within the company, it's pretty well known that this is a dream team."

—Jin Okubo

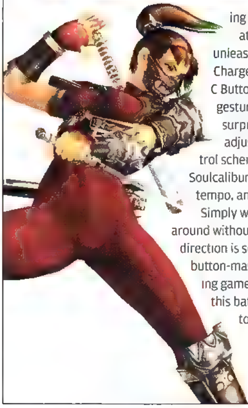
some of the previous titles), as well as folks who have worked on the Tekken and Ace Combat franchises. "Within the company, it's pretty well known that this is a dream team," asserts Okubo. "We have quite a few other teams that are a bit jealous of the staff we've been able to put together for this project."

As one would expect from a title bearing the Soulcalibur moniker, Legends also boasts far more depth than your run-of-the-mill hack-'n'-slash. "If you think of an action game, especially one with a large number of enemies, you may think that the majority of your foes are just going to be swept out of the way with one flick of the sword," says Okubo. "Our game isn't going to be like that. Obviously there will be some enemies that are weaker than others, but for the vast majority of them, the moves that they have at their disposal are very diverse, as is the way they react to the player. We really want to combine elements of the fighting and action-adventure genres." Which means you'll need to do much more than wildly flail the controller. Every confrontation plays like a bite-sized battle from a Soulcalibur fighting game, and you'll have a full repertoire of moves at your disposal. As Legends director Tetsuya Akatsuka explains, "What we did as far as the fighting system goes is we took several elements from the previous games and sort of used those as a base—elements such as the Guard Impact, the Soul Charge, and whatnot. From there, we just decided how we could kind of branch out and utilize the functionality of the Wii remote and the nunchuk. So you'll see some elements that are familiar, but they've been reworked with this Wii controller in mind so that they have a completely new feel." You can perform vertical and horizontal strikes, as well as thrusts, and slashing the remote left to right executes a different attack than slashing it right to left (the same goes for slashing up to down and vice versa). Furthermore, the speed with which you perform each movement determines whether your character does a weak or strong attack (quick for weak, slow for strong). And each fighter has a full complement of combos that you can dish out by stringing certain moves together in a particular sequence. The nunchuk's analog stick controls your character's movement, the B Button jumps, the Z Button blocks, and the A Button locks onto an opponent. The nunchuk's motion sensitivity also comes into play. Simply flicking it will perform a quick dodge in the corresponding direction, but if you hold the Z Button and flick the nunchuk just as the enemy's weapon collides with yours, you'll execute a Guard Impact, parrying the strike and leav-



The real reason the development team decided to switch to a third-person view . . .

> **"We see this as an opportunity to expand on the story and mythology."** —**Daisuke Murano**



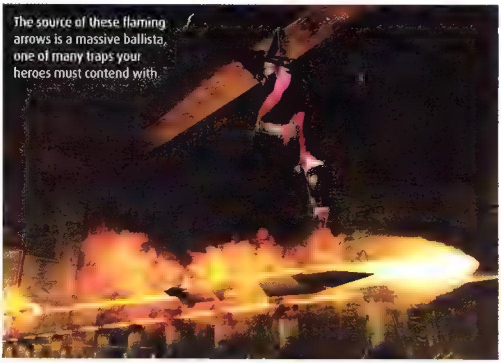
ing your foe wide open to attack. Finally, you can unleash uberpowerful Soul Charge attacks by holding the C Button and completing certain gestures with both hands. After a surprisingly brief period of adjustment, we found the control scheme to work brilliantly. Soulcalibur has always been about tempo, and Legends is no different. Simply waving the controller around without any sense of timing or direction is sort of the Wii equivalent of button-mashing in a traditional fighting game. To get the most out of this battle system, you really have to get into a flow and allow your character to finish each movement before you take the next swing.

Setting the Stage

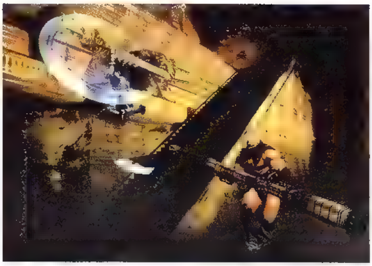
Another major area of focus for the team is to provide the adventure with as much diversity as possible. "The locations are extremely varied," states Okubo. "You'll see settings from all around the world, and the enemies that appear in each locale are unique to that stage." One of the areas that we saw during the demo took place in an Egyptian ruin, and had the player cutting down mummies and avoiding traps while navigating the sprawling catacombs. Another forced you to battle wave after wave of skilled combatants in a seaside battle arena reminiscent of previous Soulcalibur games. That stage culminated with a showdown against what the developers called a "midsized" boss despite the fact that the behemoth filled the entire screen.

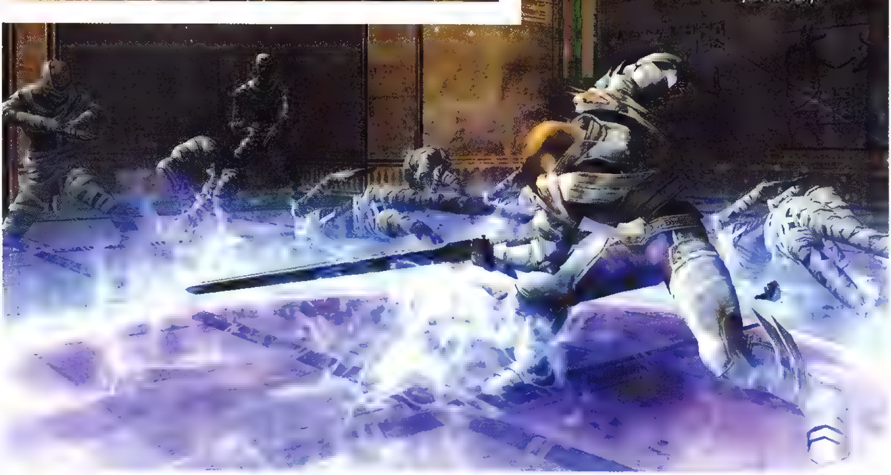
But while the team is committed to creating a deep gameplay experience, they're also very conscious of playing to their strengths. In other words, don't expect a lot of platforming or heavy puzzle elements. "Technically, we're calling the game an action-adventure, but the team feels that the action elements are much stronger than the adventure elements," opines Okuba. "It's not the sort of game where you'll do a lot of pushing of objects or flipping of switches and whatnot. It's much more focused on the weapon-based fighting, and using strategy to defeat enemies."

Part of that strategy will be to take full advantage of your surroundings, both in terms of positioning (many of the environments have terrain considerations such as stairways) and interactive elements. "There are quite a few objects in each stage that can be destroyed," reveals Akatsuka. "Some of these are placed there to empha-



The source of these flaming arrows is a massive ballista, one of many traps your heroes must contend with.





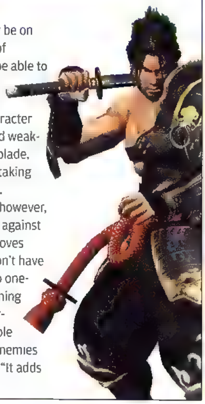
Were Siegfried played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, he might say, "Go cry to your mummy!"

size the movements of the sword, to sort of bring home the power of it as the player is slashing with the Wii remote. But you can also use many of these objects as weapons to help you take out nearby foes."

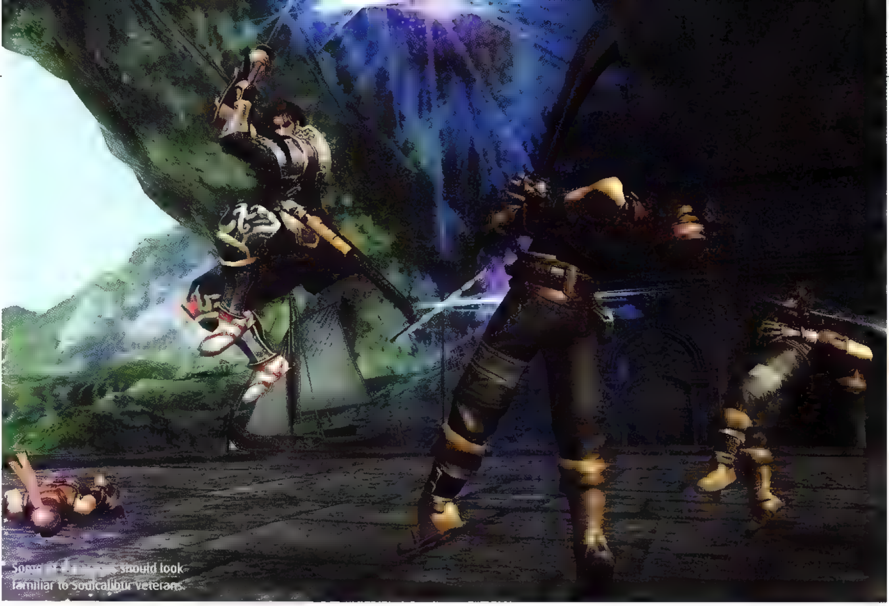
The overarching structure of the game is similar to the first Soulcalibur's Mission Battle mode or the Weapon Master mode from Soulcalibur II, in which you select your path via a world map. As in those games, you'll have a certain amount of freedom in choosing which stage to tackle next, with plenty of subquests and optional areas branching out from the main story route.

That brings us to Legends' narrative, which takes place between Soul Blade (the first game in the series, released for the PlayStation in 1996) and the original Soulcalibur. The series has always boasted a uniquely rich back story, and the developers intend to bring that to the fore with this title. "Since we're switching gears from fighting to action, we see this as an opportunity to expand on the storyline and mythology," says scenario writer Daisuke Murano, who helped pen the surprisingly compelling scripts for recent Ace Combat titles. A 16th-century empire on the brink of destruction sets the stage, but the real heart of the tale revolves around Siegfried and his gradual transformation into the maleficent Nightmare (for a quick refresher on Siegfried and his alter ego, see the A Hero's Nightmare sidebar). Murano doesn't want to reveal too much about the narrative at this point, but claims that all of the other characters' storylines are intertwined with Siegfried's fate. Of course, the legendary blades Soul Edge and Soulcalibur will play a central role as well. "There is a quest for these swords that continues throughout the game," divulges Murano.

Legends in the Making



Though the narrative spotlight may be on Siegfried, he's joined by a full cast of playable characters. In fact, you'll be able to choose two fighters before each stage, and you can switch between them on the fly. Naturally, each character comes with particular strengths and weaknesses. Siegfried wields a massive blade, for example, so he's quite adept at taking on large numbers of grunts at once. Because his attacks are quite slow, however, he might have a more difficult time against an especially agile foe. Mitsurugi moves much faster, but since his strikes don't have as much range, he's better suited to one-on-one confrontations. Other returning favorites include Taki, the only character in the game capable of a double jump, and Ivy, who can latch onto enemies and items with her whiplike sword. "It adds



Some [illegible] should look familiar to Soulcalibur veterans.

A Hero's Nightmare

[illegible]

an element of strategy and replay value," says Okubo. "Obviously, the first time you play through an area, you won't know what's ahead of you, so you'll just have to pick whichever two characters you may enjoy using. But then once you actually play through the stage, you may notice that another character you didn't select is better suited for it. And so it gives you the chance to play through it again later on as different characters, and that really changes how you approach certain challenges."

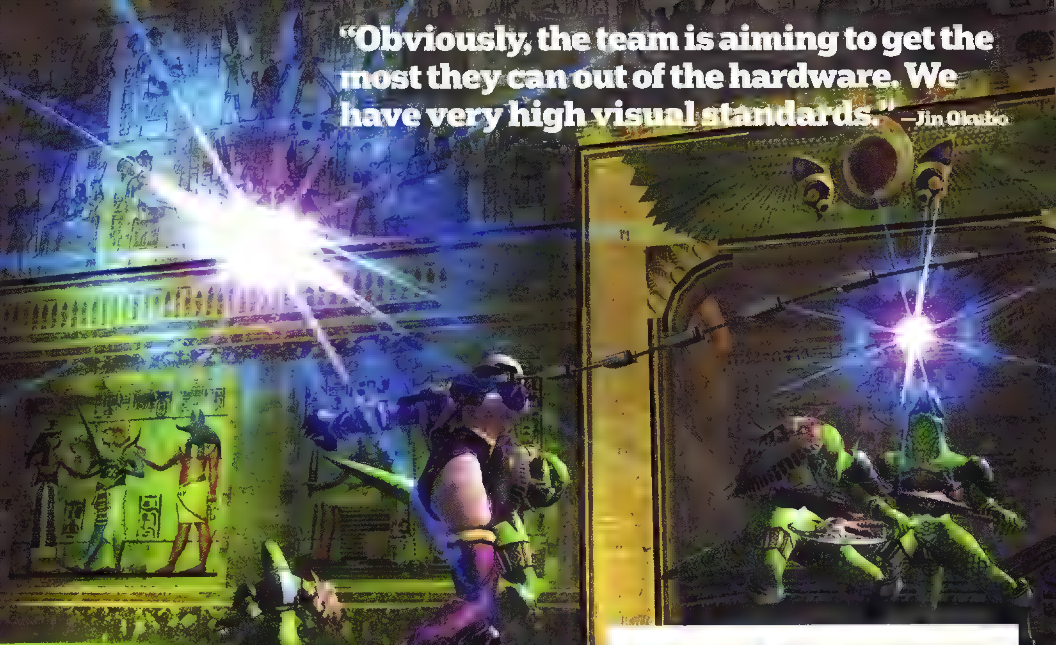
Unfortunately, the team isn't ready to reveal the rest of the lineup just yet nor discuss any of the new faces joining the saga. Akatsuka explains, "As much as we'd like to give you more details about specific figures, there are still elements of the character roster that we want to keep under wraps. One thing we do want to emphasize, though, is that we want to include as many characters as we can, and that we are doing our best to ensure that each of those characters has their own unique feel and their own unique style."

As is typical for a Soulcalibur title, a big part of that distinctiveness comes from the fact that each fighter brandishes a different weapon. What's more, you can collect additional armaments for your heroes over the course of the journey. Each weapon has unique attributes—an extended reach or a flaming blade, for example—and some are drastically more powerful than others or can even change your character's moves. "If you're playing a fighting game, all of the characters have to be balanced," Okubo points out. "But one of the nice things about an action game is that you can power up your weapon and have these various abilities that make it stronger." You can acquire these new weapons in a number of different ways, such as by completing side quests, by defeating certain foes, or as a gift from friendly acquaintances.

The Gleam of the Blade

Another trademark of the franchise is top-notch production values, and as you can see, Legends is shaping up to be one of Wii's most graphically impressive titles. "Obviously, the team is aiming to get the most they can out of the hardware," says Okubo. "We have very high visual standards, as I'm sure you're aware from previous games in the series. With the control scheme set up the way it is, it pulls the player into the game. And we want this to also be reflected in the visuals. We want the visuals to have enough impact on the player to where it really pulls them in. We're putting a lot of energy into visual effects in the game." According to Okubo, the final product will support 16:9 widescreen progressive-scan displays, and run at a constant 60 frames per second.

With the series' primary composer returning, players can also expect another epic musical score, but with a slightly different flavor to reflect the new genre. "Music that would suit an atmosphere for a two-player side-view battle would not necessarily be suited to a third-person-perspective action game," asserts Okubo. "So we're going to change the sound somewhat to best emphasize the gameplay; the way its used, the type of mood it sets, etc. We do want to keep a sense of continuity with the



> "Obviously, the team is aiming to get the most they can out of the hardware. We have very high visual standards." —Jin Okubo

series, though." Further aural immersion will come from the Wii remote's microphone, which will echo the clash of swords and other battle sound effects.

Finally, it wouldn't be Soulcalibur without some sort of multiplayer mode. Legends will include both versus and cooperative play, and though the team isn't willing to get into many specifics (nor commit to any Wi-Fi functionality), they claim that the co-op mode will feature unique stages designed specifically for two players. Akatsuka tells us, "I believe that the multiplayer modes will be a big source of appeal for the game."

We'll admit to a healthy dose of skepticism when we first heard about Legends, but after getting our hands on it and talking to the development team, we have high hopes. This could be the game that Wii owners have been waiting for. "There are probably quite a few people who dreamed about sword fights when they were children, and maybe picked up sticks or plastic swords and swung them around," muses Murano. "Personally, it's my goal to see that this game is something that allows people to fulfill those fantasies through the Wii remote."

Rune Factory

A Fantasy Harvest Moon

From the universe of Harvest Moon comes a different farming adventure...

Till the land, grow crops, catch fish, make friends and *battle monsters!* Battling against fierce beasts is very important for your survival, but making friends with them is essential for your farm life.

...Coming July 2007

Tori

I'm so happy... you made it back... I was so very worried...

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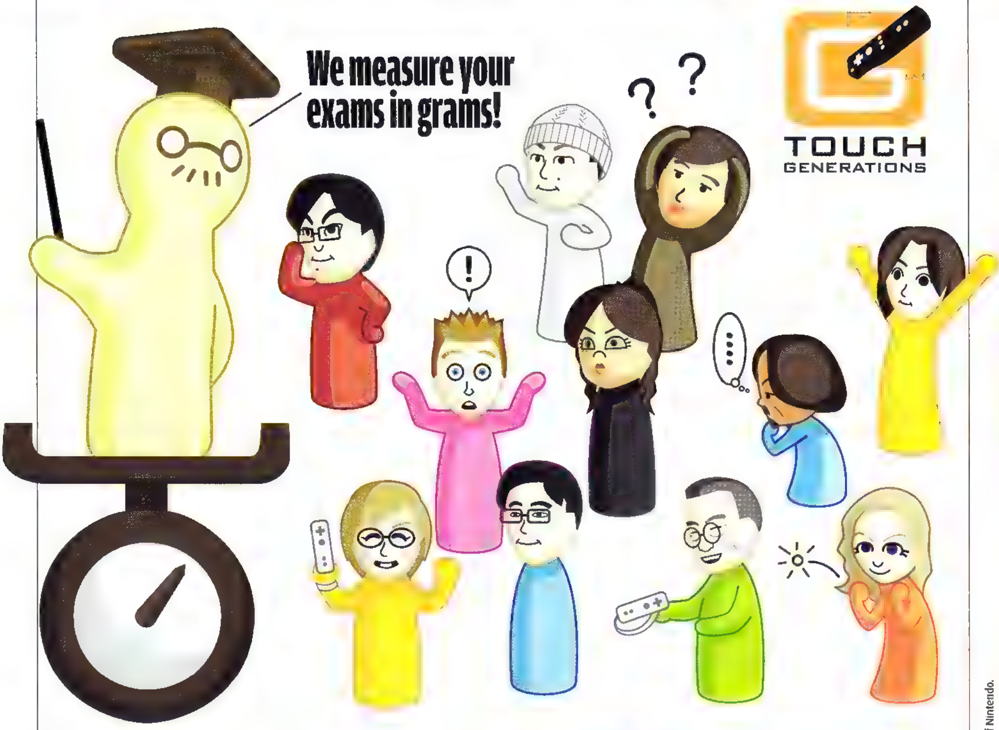
Head of the Class

Time to put on your thinking caps! **Big Brain Academy: Wii Degree** is here to keep your mind sharp during the lazy days of summer and beyond.

By Chris Shepperd


We measure your exams in grams!
?
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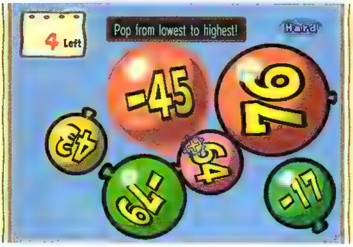
!
TOUCH GENERATIONS

Thinking Big

School's out for summer, but that's no excuse for you to tune out mentally. Keep your head on straight with daily exercises in Big Brain Academy: Wii Degree. The game is designed to get your cerebral juices flowing; it's like hitting the gym once a day, but you're working out your brain cells instead of your pecs. You can track your improvements as you play day in and day out.

If all this mental iron-pumping sounds like a lot of work, don't sweat it—not only is Wii Degree totally painless but multiplayer events make it extra fun. Wii Degree features full Mii integration, so you'll always be able to keep track of your own accomplishments. Take a look at the ways pursuing Wii Degree can help your grey matter grow.



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Daily Drills

Wii Degree's single-player test is designed for you to run through once or twice a day, just like doing a crossword puzzle over your morning bowl of cereal or running through Brain Age quizzes on the bus. It's a string of minigames that test both accuracy and speed; you can take as long as you want on a particular puzzle, but every extra second you take affects your score. (See the course work section below.) The puzzles in Wii Degree aren't intended to make you any smarter—the games can be a little tricky, but you don't need to be able to diagram a sentence, memorize your multiplication tables, or anything like that.

Once you've completed the test, you'll get an individual score for each of the five sections. You can check out which categories you did the best in, and where you struggled the most. The scores are measured in brain "weight," although your brain doesn't actually get heavier the better you do, of course. The weights are then added together to give you a final score, as well as a grade.

If you're not impressed with your performance and you think you can do better right away, feel free to retake the quiz; you can repeat it as often as you like. But if you notice that you have more problems in one category than in others, you can also run through individual minigames to target your weaknesses. Just like in the main test, Wii Degree keeps track of your results in these minigame events, letting you know precisely how much better you've gotten at certain events since you began your Big Brain Academy training.

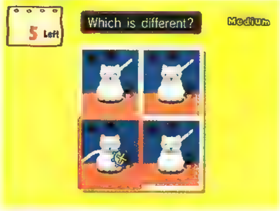
Give your brain a steady diet of Wii Degree.

Course Work

When you exercise, you don't do the same activity over and over again—if you did, you'd overwork some of your muscles and neglect the others. The same goes for Wii Degree: the five mental "exercises" you do are all intended to make you think in a different way. The subjects are Visualize, Identify, Memorize, Compute, and Analyze. All of the games are simple, Wii-remote-controlled events, and the A Button is the only button you'll ever need to use. With such simple controls, you can really concentrate on going for a high score.

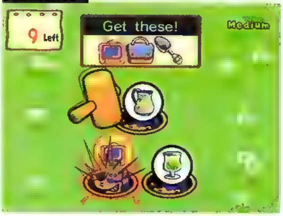
When you first begin, you might see some erratic scores—your initial test might show that you had problems with the Analyze section, then on the next pass you might struggle more with the Visualize. That's normal; you're just getting used to the events and controls. The more times you play, the better you'll be able to understand where your strengths and weaknesses are.

Visualize



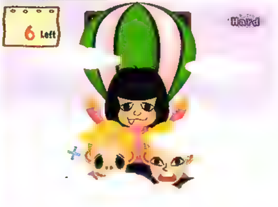
The Visualize minigames test your capacity to pick out small details within an overall image.

Identify



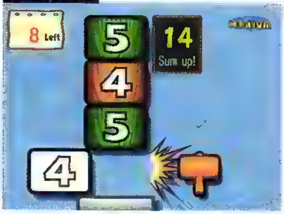
The minigames in the Identify category push your ability to recognize images and make lightning-fast determinations about them.

Memorize



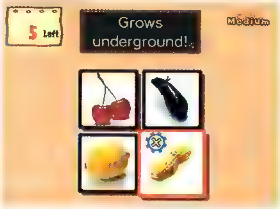
The Memorize category challenges your skill at remembering something after seeing it for only a moment.

Compute



The minigames in the Compute category all deal with numbers in some fashion, although no hard math is required.

Analyze



The Analyze category's minigames are less about testing your snap mental reflexes and more about stretching your cognitive skill.

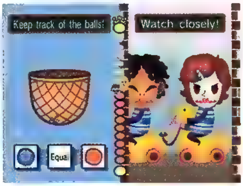
Group Study

There are several multiplayer modes in Wii Degree. (However, you can also play all of them by yourself.) Every mode requires some amount of passing the Wii remote from player to player, but you'll have plenty of time to get your wrist straps in place between minigames.

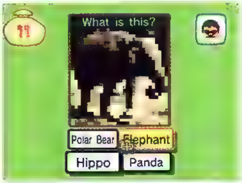
In the first activity, Mind Sprint, you and up to eight teammates take turns trying to solve a set number of events before the other team. Each team has its own Wii remote; you pass the controller down the line as you progress. If you have only one Wii remote, you're still in luck—up to four players can compete on one team versus a CPU-controlled player that uses the mental profile (or "brain") of a student record you select.

In Mental Marathon, accuracy is paramount. Players take turns solving one minigame after another under the pressure of a shotclock. Your game is over as soon as one person screws up or the clock runs out. You can gain extra time to solve the toughies if you can get through the easy puzzles quickly.

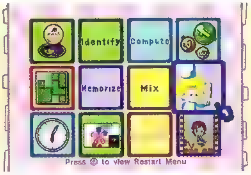
The third mode, Brain Quiz, is kind of like a game show. Up to eight opponents take turns choosing puzzles from the board. Each minigame's difficulty is random and hidden, as are the points you earn; you'll need to be both skilled and lucky to pull off a Brain Quiz win. There are a few games in Brain Quiz you won't find elsewhere in Wii Degree, so it's worth checking out even if you're playing alone.



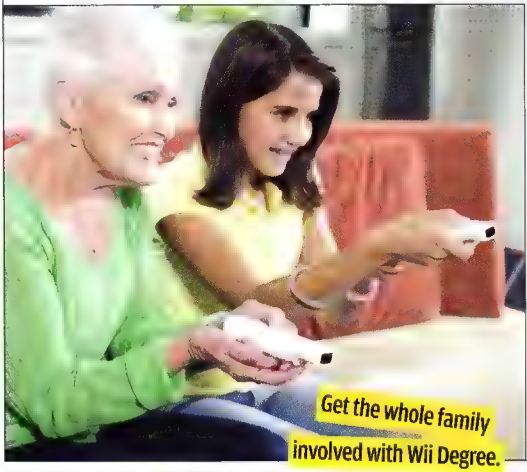
Think fast! In Mind Sprint, you'll advance only if you get the current question right, so you have to be both quick and correct.



It's not worth it to guess at answers for the sake of speed in Mental Marathon, even if it takes less time to answer.



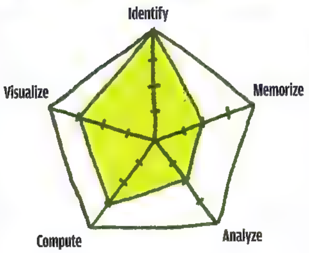
In Brain Quiz, you won't know the difficulty of a puzzle until you select it, so choose the puzzles that you're most comfortable with to increase your chances of winning.



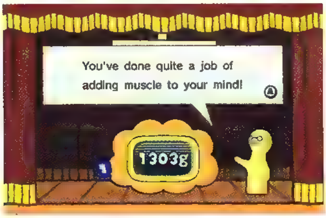
STRAIGHT A'S

Making the Grade

All of the charts and graphs intended to show your progress can be a little confusing. Here's a rundown of the ways Wii Degree tallies your brain weight. Use the information to improve the aspects of your training that you struggle with the most.

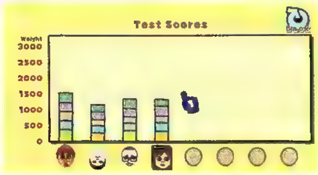


When your daily test is complete, you'll see a graph like the one above giving you a visual reference of your performance in all five categories. The more green area, the better you're doing.



You've done quite a job of adding muscle to your mind!

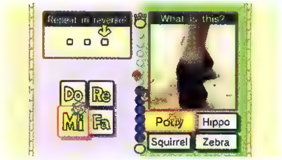
The cumulative total of the separate categories is totaled and given a weight and a letter grade.



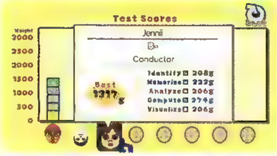
You can compare your brain weight against that of other students on the Test Scores board in the main menu's lobby.

Correspondence Training

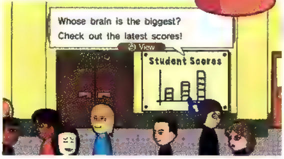
You've read that in the multiplayer event Mind Sprint you can have the CPU act as a brain based on the student record of another player. But that brain doesn't actually have to come from a player whose record is saved on your Wii. Instead, you can use the student records of anyone around the nation online via WiiConnect24. It's a piece of cake to send and receive student records, and it doesn't require you and your distant friends to be playing at the same time. Once you've obtained your friend's Wii record, you can challenge his brain to a round of Mind Sprint, or check out how well he's done on the main test. Also, when you receive someone's profile his Mii will appear in the school halls of Big Brain Academy's main menu.



How does your brain measure up against your pal on the other side of the world? Find out in a quick game of Mind Sprint.



Take a look at your friend's performance statistics, then write him a message to taunt him when your brain weighs more.



Whose brain is the biggest?
Check out the latest scores!

Be sure to look for your friends' Miis loitering outside the classrooms between events.

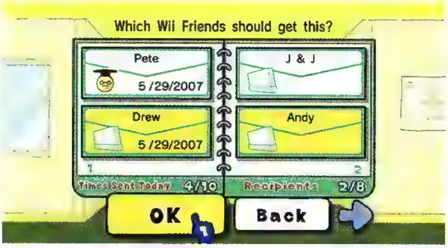
Online Education

The always-on, always-online functionality of WiiConnect24 received a lot of buzz when the Wii was introduced, but until now it's been limited to the Wii Message Board, the Everyone Votes Channel, and sending Miis back and forth with your friends. Since Wii Degree is the first game that uses WiiConnect24 prominently, it's a good time to go over what it does and how it works. The first thing to understand is that WiiConnect24 isn't the same thing as Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection (which is what handles simultaneous online gameplay). In fact, your Wii doesn't even have to be ready to play games for WiiConnect24 to work—it just needs to be plugged in and connected to the Internet.

To take advantage of WiiConnect24 in Big Brain Academy, you first need to exchange friend codes with another Wii owner. Then make sure that the Autocheck feature is turned on in both your and your friend's Big Brain Academy options. The Autocheck function utilizes WiiConnect24 to search your list of friends automatically to see who else has played Wii Degree.

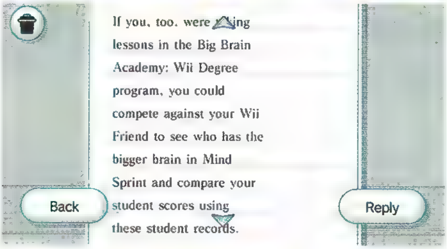
Once you've established which of your friends has a Wii Degree record, it's time to send your student record over to a friend. If you have multiple student records saved on your Wii, select the file you want to send, then the person you want to send it to. It will be sent automatically, and your friend will be notified of a new student record the next time he turns on his Wii. And of course, you'll receive an announcement if your friends send their student records to you.

With your friends' student records in hand, it's time to see how well you stack up against your pals' brains. Then be sure to remind your friends how much bigger your brain is!



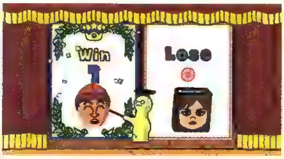
Which Wii Friends should get this?

You can see in the address book who among your friends has played Wii Degree—the professor will appear on their entry.

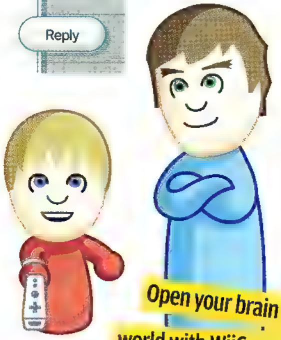


If you, too, were [illegible]ing lessons in the Big Brain Academy: Wii Degree program, you could compete against your Wii Friend to see who has the bigger brain in Mind Sprint and compare your student scores using these student records.

If you send your student record to someone who hasn't played Wii Degree, the person will receive a note explaining what game is about.



You can quickly identify the student records you've received via WiiConnect24—an imported record will look like a textbook.



Open your brain to the world with WiiConnect24.

EVERYONE 10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF
HARRY POTTER characters, [illegible]es and related in[illegible]
Entertainment Inc. Harry Potter Publishing Ri[illegible] ©

A WIZARD'S WORLD

Live the life of the world's most recognizable magic-user in **Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix** for Wii.

By Chris Hoffman

Who hasn't occasionally wished they could step into the robes of Harry Potter and cast spells with a wave of their hand, talk with enchanted portraits, take classes on potions, or battle the forces of dark magic? In Electronic Arts' Wii adaptation of the latest Harry Potter film, you'll get to experience all that and more firsthand. Find out what it's like to be The Boy Who Lived.

Under a Spell

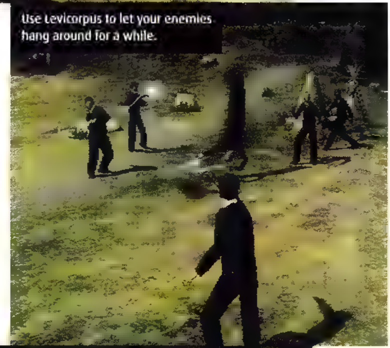
Previous Harry Potter games have let you play through Harry's story and witness his exploits, but only Order of the Phoenix attempts to let you truly see life through the eyes of the young wizard. Assuming the role of Harry Potter revolves, first and foremost, around the ability to cast magical spells. As you might guess (or already know, if you read last issue's preview), the Wii remote acts as your wand in the game, and casting spells is at the heart of almost everything you do—from exploring Hogwarts to preparing for the inevitable battle with Lord Voldemort and his Death Eater followers.

Most of the spells are simple and intuitive to cast. After drawing your wand with the B Button you can flick the remote upward to cast Accio—a basic spell that pulls objects toward Harry. To cast a spell with the opposite effect—Depulso—you need merely flick the remote downward. And while the nunchuk is used primarily for moving Harry around with the Control Stick, you'll also use it to cast Wingardium Leviosa: simply lift up on the nunchuk and the remote simultaneously to cast the very useful levitation spell. With Accio, Depulso, and Wingardium Leviosa at your command, you'll be able to interact with the world in a variety of ways, from lifting brooms and causing them to sweep up piles of leaves to pushing around benches that act as steps.

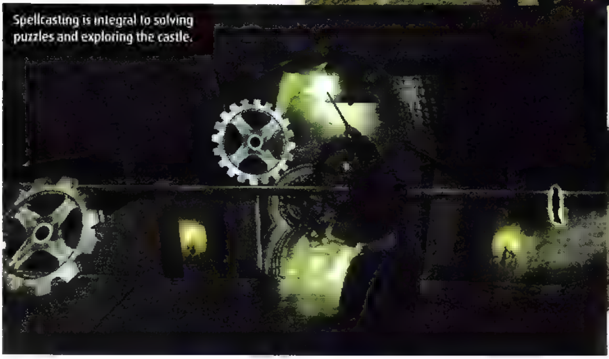
The other noncombat spells aren't quite as wide-ranging in their uses, but they get the job done. Incendio (cast by shaking the remote back and forth) sets torches and other flammable items ablaze, Reducto (activated by making a counterclockwise motion with the remote) destroys certain objects, and Reparo (cast with a clockwise spin of the remote) fixes things that have been broken, such as damaged walkways or shattered statues.

As readers of the book know, a major part of Order of the Phoenix's story involves Harry teaching Defence Against the Dark Arts to his fellow students in the DA (Dumbledore's Army), so it's no surprise that combat spells are also part of your magical repertoire. Required duels are actually few and far between in the game, but if you wish, you can point your wand at another student (more than likely a Slytherin who's mouthed off one too many times) and try to initiate a fight.

Throughout the course of the game you'll learn six combat spells, including Stupefy (thrust forward with both the remote and nunchuk to stun an opponent), Levicorpus (lift up with the remote and nunchuk to levitate a foe helplessly upside down), Rictusempra (flick the remote downward to initiate a tickling curse), and Petrificus Totalus (shake the remote back and forth to paralyze an enemy). The two most crucial combat spells, however, are Protego (a defensive shield spell activated by flicking the remote upward) and Expelliarmus (a spell that disarms and defeats a weakened opponent, cast with a counterclockwise spin of the remote). That should show Draco Malfoy a thing or two.



Use Levicorpus to let your enemies hang around for a while.



Spellcasting is integral to solving puzzles and exploring the castle.

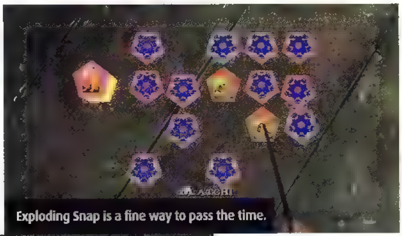
Hogwarts in all its glory—and it's yours to explore.

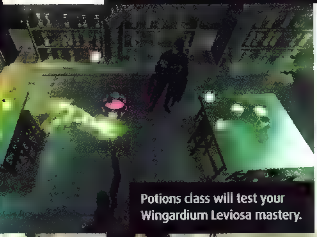
Life at Hogwarts

You can't have a Harry Potter game without an authentic re-creation of Hogwarts, so the developers at EA UK have gone to great lengths to create a highly detailed, fully explorable version of the magical school based upon blueprints from the filmmakers, movie sets, and descriptions from JK Rowling's books. From the Great Hall to the Grand Staircase to the Gryffindor common room to Professor Snape's dungeon, it's all here. If you want to stick to the movie's story, you can rely on Ron and Hermione (who are always at Harry's side) to provide hints on where to go next, and you can use the Marauder's Map to conveniently locate important places or people. If you'd rather just envelop yourself in the magic of the school, however, there's plenty to do.

Hogwarts is nothing if not a place of discovery. You can use spells to interact with almost every object in the castle—rugs, tapestries, statues, paintings, and more. There are hidden wall plaques to uncover, torches to light, and miniquests to complete that will allow you to use secret passages behind talking portraits. You can take a break from exploration to compete in games of Wizard's Chess, Gobstones, or Exploding Snap with fellow students, or attend classes in charms, potions, or herbology. If you look hard enough you'll even find references to previous Potter adventures, like the entrance to the now-sealed Chamber of Secrets in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. With each new find you'll earn Discovery Points, and when you earn enough your spells become more powerful, plus you gain access to bonus content in a secret Room of Rewards.

When you're not just wandering the castle, the game's story unfolds through numerous missionlike tasks. Early on, you'll need to gather the members of the DA in the Room of Requirement, and to do so you'll have to help out your fellow students in a variety of ways, such as by searching the grounds for talking gargoyle statues, helping Fred and George Weasley hide illicit packages of magical pranks, and aiding Cho Chang in retrieving her mail from a reluctant owl (smoochies almost included). After the vile Professor Dolores Umbridge takes over as Hogwarts' headmaster, your missions become more rebellious, and include acts such as magically turning courtyards into swamps, planting Howlers (screaming letters, in case you're unaware) in the Owlery, sabotaging Umbridge's castlewide system of loudspeakers, and dueling with Umbridge's Inquisitorial Squad. It's all in a year's work when you're Harry Potter.


Exploding Snap is a fine way to pass the time.


Potions class will test your Wingardium Leviosa mastery.

THE STORY SO FAR

Harry History

Order of the Phoenix tells the tale of Harry's fifth year at Hogwarts. If you haven't been keeping track, here's a summary of years one through four.

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

Professor Quirrell! Harry, Professor Quirrell will be one of your teachers at Hogwarts.

In Harry's first year at Hogwarts, he met his friends Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. Together they put a stop to a professor possessed by Lord Voldemort—the ultimate evil.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets

The titular Chamber of Secrets is the home of a basilisk (essentially a giant snake) being controlled by the memory of a young Voldemort. Naturally, Harry takes care of that.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

Time travel, a werewolf, and the appearance of Harry's wrongly imprisoned godfather, Sirius Black, were all part of Harry's third year.

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

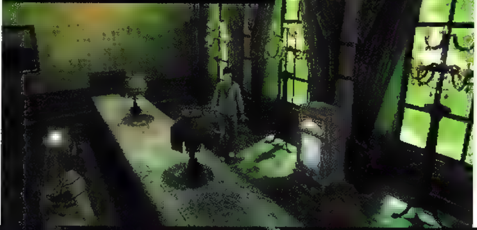
Harry successfully completed the trials of the Tri-Wizard Tournament, but it was all a setup to complete the revival of Lord Voldemort.

Beyond the Castle Walls

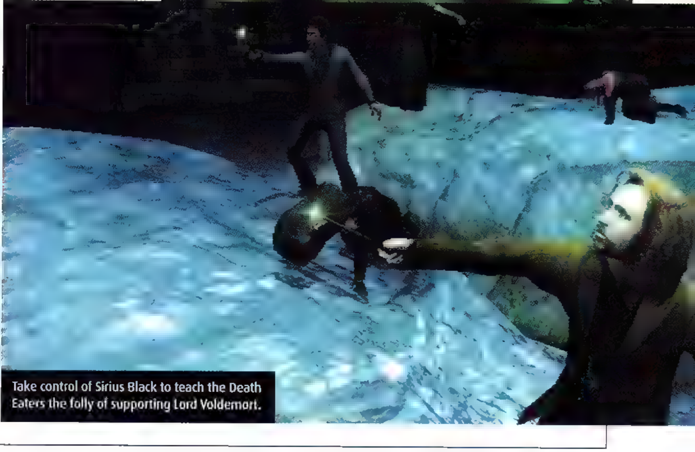
Although the courtyards and corridors of Hogwarts are where you'll spend most of your time, you won't always be confined to the castle. You'll be able to visit the surrounding grounds, including the boathouse, the stone circle, Hagrid's hut, and various nearby pathways (although you can't, unfortunately, venture into the Forbidden Forest). More significantly, a few portions of the adventure take place outside of Hogwarts entirely. The game begins with a short introduction at Little Whinging (during which you must ward off some attacking Dementors), followed by a trip to Sirius Black's family home at 12 Grimmauld Place. Though the initial visit to Grimmauld Place is little more than a tutorial (you're tasked with helping the Weasleys with housework), you'll get to return there during the holidays for some additional exploration and plot progression.

Ultimately, Harry's journey culminates at the Ministry of Magic's Department of Mysteries for the game's fateful climactic moments. During these combat-heavy scenes, you'll get to control Sirius as he battles Bellatrix Lestrange and Lucius Malfoy, then assume the role of Dumbledore himself and face off against Lord Voldemort.

After the story draws to a close, you'll still have the opportunity to return to Hogwarts, where you'll be able to accomplish any optional objectives you haven't finished, complete your collection of treasures in the Room of Rewards, and maybe even help Harry earn an Outstanding grade in all of his classes. There's so much to uncover, so many things to do, and so many out-of-the-way places to explore that die-hard Harry Potter fans could find themselves playing Order of the Phoenix for many hours after all the Death Eaters have been sentenced to Azkaban. And that, young magic-users, is what living in a wizard's world is all about.



12 Grimmauld Place isn't that nice of a place to visit, and you wouldn't want to live there.



Take control of Sirius Black to teach the Death Eaters the folly of supporting Lord Voldemort.

A Perfect 10

Lara celebrates her tenth with a trip down memory lane in **Tomb Raider: Anniversary** for Wii.

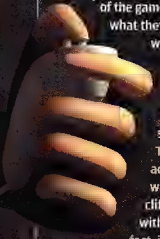
By Andy Myers

> “You’ll be able to take a step in a direction that you won’t be able to on the other versions.”
> —Tim Longo, creative lead

Ever wonder what the gaming landscape would be like without Lara Croft? It’s difficult to fathom. Her 1996 debut revolutionized the industry, spawning countless clones and beginning a cultural phenomenon. But imagine if that original game concept were attempted today, using modern technology and a Wii control scheme—then you’ll start to understand the thinking behind Tomb Raider: Anniversary. It’s not a port, but rather a fully reimagined version of the iconic action-platformer.

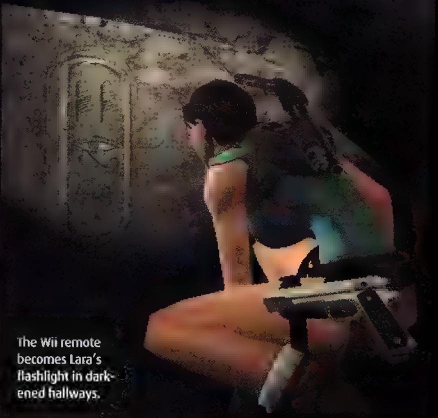
Taking Control

While Tomb Raider: Anniversary is slated for release across multiple platforms, the Wii version is unique—so unique that it’s really its own beast. In the words of Tim Longo, the project’s creative lead, “Playing the Wii version, you’ll be able to take a step in a direction that you won’t be able to on the other versions, the obvious reason being the controller.” Longo, along with producer Morgan Gray (both from Crystal Dynamics), were kind enough to give us a guided tour of the game and show us what they’re out to achieve with the Wii remote and nunchuk.

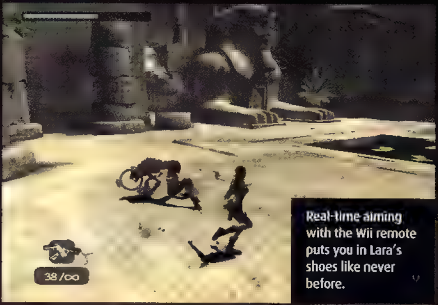


Most of Anniversary’s gameplay consists of classic Tomb Raider action, from scaling walls to diving from cliffs to sparring with wild animals. In fact, it plays a lot like Lara’s previous title, Tomb Raider: Legend. But Anniversary goes well beyond Legend, adding new moves and, of course, Wii functionality to Lara’s arsenal. When Lara brandishes her guns, for instance, the Wii remote aims her weapons in real time, giving you a level of control never before experienced in a Tomb Raider title. Even when the guns are holstered, a reticle remains onscreen for camera control. A touch of a button transforms the remote into a flashlight to search dark areas for clues and secret items. And if you twist the remote in either direction, the beam will narrow or spread out—a nice touch that gives the flashlight a lifelike feel. It’s an especially cool addition that the other versions of the game won’t have, and Crystal Dynamics is going so far as to redesign certain areas specifically for Wii to make better use of the tool.

The Wii remote doesn’t hog the limelight, though—the nunchuk is also used in some interesting ways. When you’re engaged in combat, a nunchuk flick in any direction will execute a quick dodge. And while climbing or shimmying along a ledge, well-timed nunchuk movements will hasten Lara’s progress. A new implement—the revamped grappling hook—is deployed with a shake of the nunchuk, and allows Lara to run along walls while holding onto the hook’s tether. The developers are still tweaking the gesture controls, but the team is clearly putting great time and effort into getting them just right, and has high hopes for the Wii version. “It’s always hard for us to say that one will be the definitive version,” explains Longo, “because we’re working with all the people who are doing the other versions, too. But we’re all so excited by the Wii in general that we want to make this the version that people really want to check out.”



The Wii remote becomes Lara’s flashlight in darkened hallways.



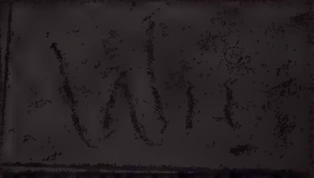
Real-time aiming with the Wii remote puts you in Lara’s shoes like never before.

Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Anniversary Edition © 2007 Eidos Interactive Ltd. Developed by Crystal Dynamics, Inc. Published by Eidos, Inc. 2007. Lara Croft Tomb Raider: Anniversary Edition, Lara Croft, Tomb Raider, the Tomb Raider logo, Eidos and the Eidos logo, Crystal Dynamics and the Crystal Dynamics logo are all trademarks of Eidos Interactive Ltd.

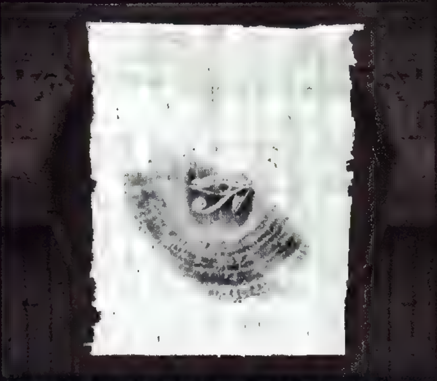
The Fine Details

Adapting Wii control to Lara's legacy is only part of the story—a slew of new activities await the heroine. "There's always been this sense that Lara's an archeologist, and that she actually thinks things through, and isn't limited to pushing blocks and shooting things," observes Morgan Gray. "This is the first time we've been able to actually take that step forward." Crystal Dynamics is taking the franchise to the next level by redesigning all of the game's puzzles around the Wii remote. Adding such a significant element to the Tomb Raider series without compromising the fun was a huge challenge for the dev team. "A lot of the unique content is localized experiences," explains Longo. "Once we're in that experience, and change your view, and make it very obvious to you that you're now in Wii land—then we go crazy, because now we have full control over everything, and you're not being chased by a bear or having to shoot and do all this stuff." What Longo calls "Wii land" is a first-person, fixed-camera view that you'll enter to solve puzzles that vary from quick activities like spinning wheels or demolishing a barrier with a pick axe, to much more involved experiences. During our demo, we encountered a room that contained five pillars, each one with a small sand pit at its base. A nearby clue revealed that each pillar has a symbol associated with it. In puzzle view, we drew a symbol in the appropriate sand pit using the Wii remote, and we were on our way to solving the elaborate puzzle.

These examples only scratch the surface. "There's a whole host of Wii-specific puzzles," tells Gray. "In a lot of ways, the Wii has allowed us to add a lot of coolness that we just couldn't before." These Wii moments will also extend into the collecting aspect of the game. Using the flashlight, you'll find hidden artifacts, but you'll need to brush away residue with the Wii remote before you can extract one of your finds from its resting place. Other secrets include stone carvings that can be recorded with charcoal rubbings that you can store in your inventory, and which will sometimes serve as clues for later puzzles. And remember the interactive cut-scenes introduced in Legend? They're back, but with gestures in place of button presses. "Because we're still figuring out what it's like to make a Wii game, what the development is for controls and such, we gravitate toward Wii-ifying every little thing," admits Longo. But he assures us that the game isn't gimmicky. "We pretty quickly figured out from playing other games, and from prototyping some stuff out, that we don't want to go too far with that. So we really chose our battles."



One puzzle involves drawing shapes in the sand.



Catalog Lara's findings by rubbing charcoal with the Wii remote.

> "The Wii has allowed us to add a lot of coolness that we just couldn't before." —Morgan Gray, producer

MOVING MOMENTS

Under Wii's Influence

While making Tomb Raider: Anniversary for Wii, the folks at Crystal Dynamics sought inspiration from the library of existing Wii titles. During our chat, producer Morgan Gray and creative lead Tim Longo discussed some of their favorites.

"The most inspiring ones, I'd say, were the localized-experience ones—like **WarioWare**, **Cooking Mama**. We were able to [ask], how can we have these encapsulated fun Wii moments in a Tomb Raider world, which no other game can really give you? I mean there's not a lot of archeological-tomb-raiding games out there." —Tim Longo

"For combat, we looked at **Red Steel**. Then there's that dude that runs around and jumps—we checked him out, too. Isn't he royalty of some sort?" —Morgan Gray

"**Trauma Center** and **Elebits** came up, too. A lot of the physics interactions. The drawing in the sand—there's some reminiscence of **Trauma Center** in there." —Tim Longo

Scrub!
Just follow along the laceration in a zig-zag pattern.
STITCHES

Revival of the Fittest

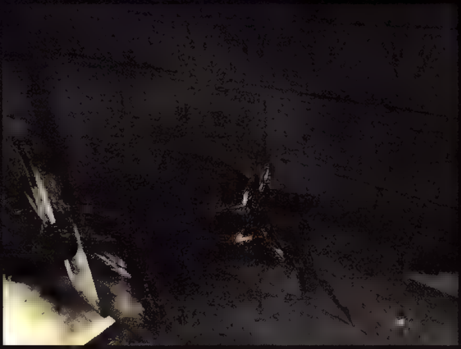
Remaking a game with as much clout as Tomb Raider is a daunting task, and the team at Crystal Dynamics knows it. Says Gray, "No matter how you look at it, and how good of a game we make right now, the impact that the first game had – you can't beat it." But Anniversary is not meant to be an exact remake. In fact, the dev team is more interested in capturing the spirit of the original than in remaking every little detail. "It's the feel that you're actually in these set pieces that you remember from 10 years ago," shares Longo. "There's enough of it there to get that nostalgia buzz going, but it's not cumbersome." That feeling from the first game is alive and well in Anniversary, but brought up to spec on Wii with a much higher level of detail. Even compared to Lara's most recent title, Tomb Raider: Legend, Anniversary shines brightly. It's significantly longer, and Gray and team promise a more challenging experience.

Even though Anniversary is not a one-to-one remake, fans of the original shouldn't be disappointed. Classic moments, such as fighting T. rexes and diving into waterfalls, have been remade with the utmost care. Plus, Anniversary's levels will have much more to sink your teeth into, with multiple paths, additional enemies, and tons of hidden items. Even Lara herself looks better than ever, with creator Toby Gard once again having a hand in her design. In Gray's words, "I think the initial goal that everyone started with was to move away from plasticine Barbie doll, move away from polygonal blow-up doll, and try to make something that no one has to feel ashamed for being a fan of." In many ways, Anniversary is both a remake and an all-new adventure.

Lara's "Legend" look lives on in Anniversary.

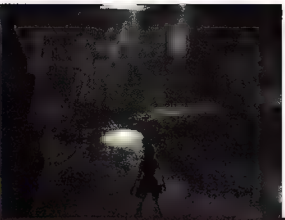
> "It's the feel that you're actually in these set pieces that you remember from ten years ago."
>
> —Tim Longo

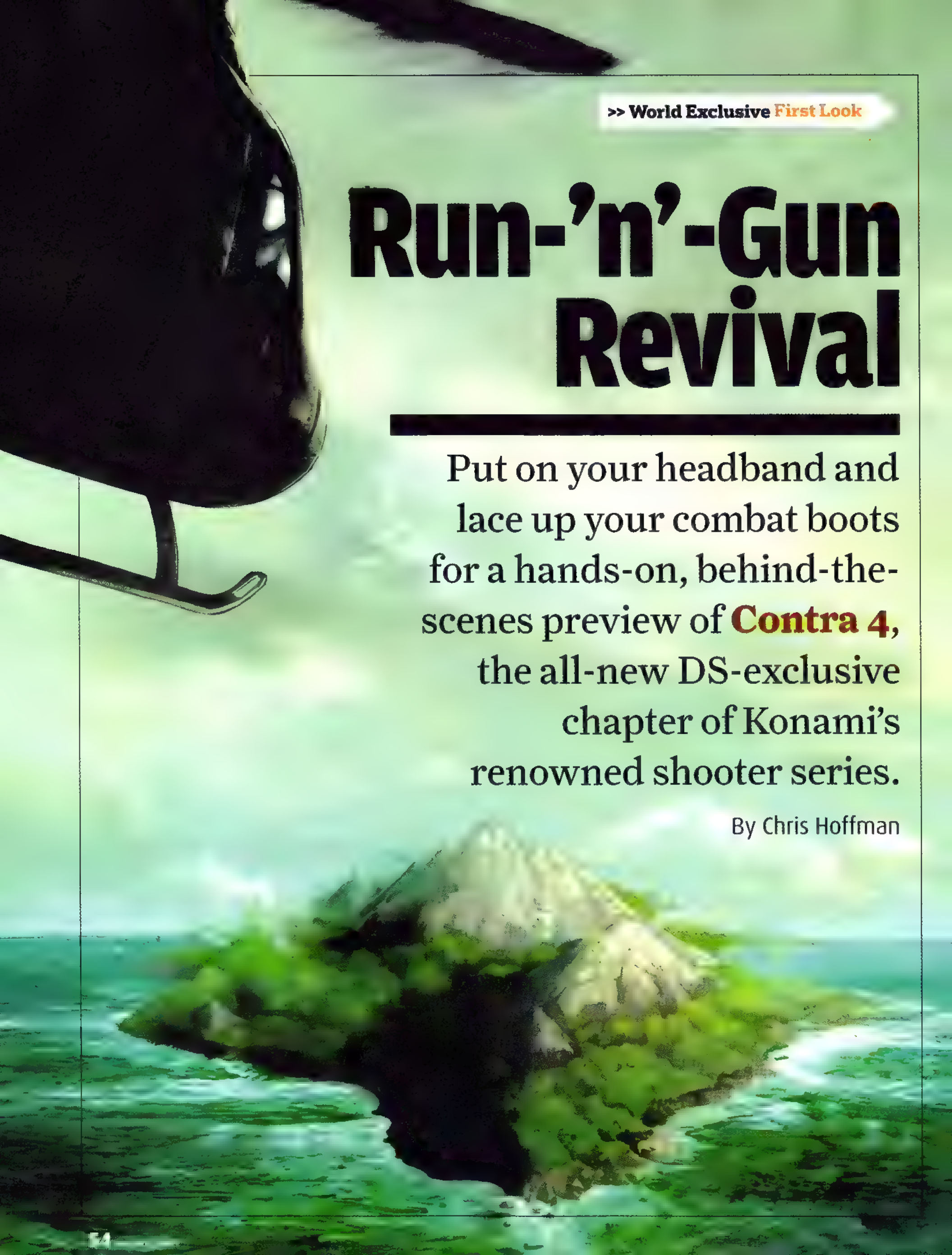
With Wii control in the mix, you've got one of the most engaging Tomb Raider experiences in years. "We're huge Wii fans," exclaims Gray. "Legend was our first time bringing Tomb Raider to Nintendo hardware. That was our baby step. With Anniversary, this is our first real step. We basically want to use this as a springboard to do bigger and greater things on Wii, whether it's taking Tomb Raider and moving it further into the Wii space, or [creating] an original IP." Expect the team's first Wii offering to surface this fall.



Tomb Raider
Past & Present

Tomb Raider
1996


Tomb Raider: Anniversary
2007

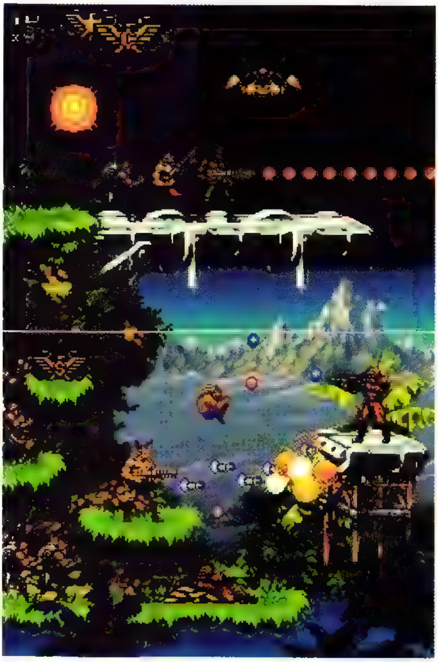


>> World Exclusive **First Look**

Run-'n'-Gun Revival

Put on your headband and lace up your combat boots for a hands-on, behind-the-scenes preview of **Contra 4**, the all-new DS-exclusive chapter of Konami's renowned shooter series.

By Chris Hoffman



Classic, hard-core 2-D gameplay meets four-player dual-screen action. Gaming doesn't get much better than this.

For shooter fans, few games from the days of the NES are as memorable as Contra. Intense, explosive, and packed with challenge, Contra defined the run-'n'-gun subgenre. Who can forget blowing away the Red Falcon's alien grunts, somersaulting through a hail of bullets, grabbing one of the wicked weapon power-ups, and teaming up with a friend to lay waste to awesome bosses? And, of course, you could always input the classic Konami Code to gain 30 lives when the going got too tough. Many years and several sequels later, that same brand of shoot-to-thrill action is arriving on Nintendo DS courtesy of Contra 4.

Forget about touch-screen control; Contra 4 is old-school to the core. Developer WayForward's philosophy is to create a game that looks and feels like classic side-scrolling 2-D Contra games but expands upon them with all-new levels, additional gameplay elements, and action that spans both screens. The game delivers from the get-go, as legendary Contra heroes Bill Rizer and Lance Bean, along with two other warriors (code-named Mad Dog and Scorpion), return to Galuga island—the setting of the original Contra—a couple of years after the events of Contra III. The elite soldiers waste no time leaping from their chopper and plunging headlong into battle with the forces of Black Viper, Red Falcon's second-in-command (and the main villain of Operation C on the Game Boy).

The lush jungle vegetation, mountainous backdrops, and sparkling blue waters belie countless threats: nonstop waves of enemy troopers, hidden gun emplacements, red-garbed snipers, grenadiers, rotating turrets, and more. As you run, jump, and climb through the levels, you'll blast blimps and pillboxes to obtain weapon power-ups—including standards like a machine gun, flamethrower, laser, Crush Gun, Spread Gun, and Hunter to increase your firepower. You can hold two weapons at once (as in Contra III), and better yet, you can stack power-ups of the same type to make the weapons even stronger, such as upgrading the Spread Gun's three shots to five or adding a triple shot to the Hunter.

While familiar obstacles like exploding bridges (now destroyed by suicidal enemies) will make Contra vets feel right at home, new content such as a huge track-mounted cannon will keep you guessing what will happen next. Even the armed bunker from the end of the first stage of the NES game is back with a new twist; when you breach its initial defenses, it rises out of the ground to reveal additional armaments.

A later level starts in an enemy lab, where zombielike enemies explode if they get close, and alien vermin crawl through pipes on the upper screen before dropping to ground level. Eventually the stage moves outdoors to reveal a vertically scrolling waterfall reminiscent of the third stage in the original Contra, complete with moving platforms and mortar soldiers hiding within the falls. After climbing ropes and scaling sheer cliff walls to make your way to the top, you'll come face-to-face with several enemy squads and an amphibious boss monster (sporting razor-sharp tentacles) that takes up most of both screens.

Konami isn't ready to reveal what else awaits the grizzled war heroes—other than more massive bosses and plenty of alien-blasting carnage—but an early version of the game also features a zip-line-style grappling hook that lets you quickly grab onto certain ledges and ceilings, and Konami representatives have disclosed that a four-player simultaneous mode is in the works. From what we've seen and played so far, Contra 4 is living up to the lofty standards set by its 8- and 16-bit predecessors—but don't just take our word for it. Turn the page to get the details straight from the creators at Konami and WayForward.

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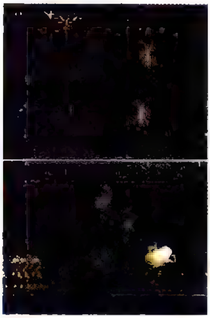
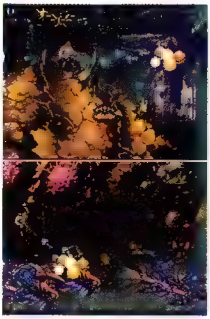
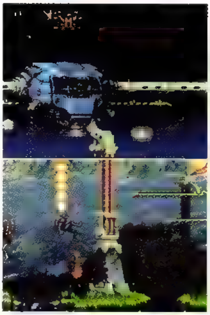


When you're battling legions of zombies and wall-crawling aliens, sometimes the ceiling is the safest place to unleash some explosive fury.



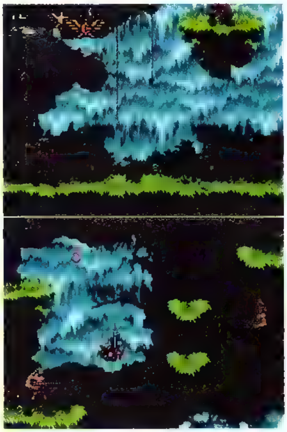
Contra 4's alien creatures range from big to gargantuan. Powerful weapons like the Crush Gun will help cut them down to size.



You'll have to keep an eye on both screens to survive Black Viper's forces. This track-mounted cannon delivers death from above.

INTERVIEW: THE CONTRA-VERSY CONTINUES

What we've seen of **Contra 4** barely scratches the game's surface. To find out what else is in store for players as they battle Black Viper's forces, we gathered intel from associate producers Tomm Hulett and Simon Lai from Konami and director Matt Bozon of WayForward.



This waterfall level embodies WayForward's design philosophy of "make it familiar but do not copy."

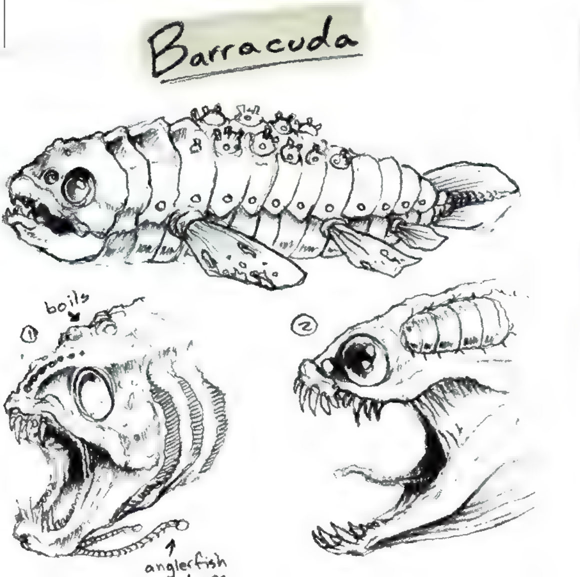
Nintendo Power: What's it like getting to work on one of the most respected shooter series in gaming?
Tomm Hulett: It's definitely an honor. This is one of those opportunities that only comes along once in a career, and I think I speak for everyone on the project when I say we won't be wasting it.
Matt Bozon: Yeah, it's exhilarating and exhausting. When Konami requested a 2-D Contra sequel, it was surreal. We were excited that a new Contra was coming out, but then double-slapped with the idea that we'd be making it.
Simon Lai: Every time we review new material from the team, I can't help but think, "Wow, I'm really working on CONTRA!" It's very exciting and nerve-racking at the same time! It's such a rare opportunity to contribute to a series with such a heritage, and also one that we all grew up with.

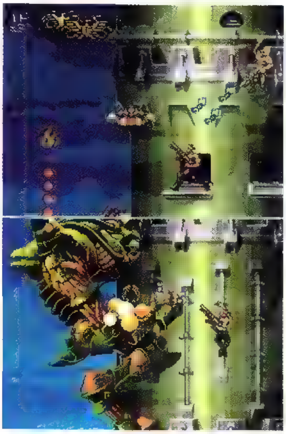
NP: Did you have to do any special research to make a game that really felt like Contra?
MB: Our designers divided successful themes from the previous two decades into camps, and built scenarios from there. We also played a ton of Contra on SNES, NES, and Genesis to see what felt right in terms of cementing the brand. We dissected the previous games to learn everything we could about how shots were handled, how the players moved, and where to put animation where it would help but not impede the reflex-heavy action. The programming team has worked tirelessly to duplicate the feeling of Contra. We want it to feel like no time has passed between 2-D sequels.
TH: Simon and I play through the original Contra at least twice a week, and usually one of the other games too.
SL: Playing the games is a must, and we certainly couldn't make Contra 4 without going through the entire series and looking at where it's been. Additionally, to help us grasp what Contra *isn't* as much as what it *is*, we looked into other great shooters, like Metal Slug and Gunstar Heroes, etc.
TH: This is important, because it allows us to discern whether or not elements of Contra 4 feel like Contra in a tangible way that can't be put into words.

NP: Which previous Contra game is your favorite or inspired you the most?
SL: It's definitely about the original NES Contra. The big moment for me is probably reaching the heart of Red Falcon at the end of the game and pounding that B button as fast as you can to take it out before he takes any more of your lives. It's a pretty simple battle as far as last bosses go, but there's something cathartic about just wailing on that thing after fighting through eight stages.
MB: The team at WayForward is pretty unanimous . . . we love the jetbike SNES stage that ends with that crazy missile battle. The player movement for Contra 4 was based largely on the SNES game, though the game's pacing is a mix between all Nintendo Contras.
TH: It sounds stupid, but my favorite Contra moment is the very beginning of Contra III. There's a car in the street that doesn't do anything—but you can shoot it and there's a huge explosion. As a gamer, that told me that Contra III meant business, so I should strap myself in or get out of the way. I hope our game can send a similar message to hard-core gamers everywhere.

NP: How did you deal with incorporating the second screen?
TH: From the very beginning, we wanted to use both screens for gameplay. Contra's always been about fast action and over-the-top thrills, so why waste the second screen on a map or inventory screen when it could be filled with enemies and bullets?
SL: The biggest obstacle to this was the gap between the two screens. Without it, bullet trajectories would be messed up, but with it there, we knew the player couldn't be stuck inside it . . . so that took a lot of careful tuning.
MB: We spent a lot of time on this. Konami wanted two screens of gameplay, so we decided to invisibly

Below:
Some bosses, like the aquatic fiend seen in this concept sketch, are based on nature gone out of control. "The large segmented fish boss is pretty crazy to behold," affirms director Matt Bozon. "Look for him in the ocean stage. The second screen gives us room to make some pretty humongous critters."





There's nothing better than a few buddies at your side when you're fighting an enormous robot.

swap the 3-D engine freely between screens. So, one moment you can have a lot of stuff on the touch screen, then a moment later there are heavy effects on the top screen. Generally, the joint dual screen allowed us to create a lot of new situations.

NP: Will there be any 3-D or top-down stages? Any vehicle levels?

TH: The tunnel stages will make a dramatic return.

MB: Those stages are full 3-D, but still sprite-based.

SL: And how can you have a Contra game without vehicles to ride?

MB: In addition to riding in enemy vehicles, we thought it would be fun to hijack a miniboss.

SL: Please look forward to it!

NP: How do you balance new content versus familiar content? What new features did you especially want to add?

SL: Our goal is to make a game that *feels* just like you're playing the Contra you remember. Running, shooting, jumping, weapons, enemies, and bosses all need to feel like the original (S)NES games. However, we're definitely making a new game for a new system and that means creating all-new . . . everything!

MB: We liked the character selection from Contra: Hard Corps [on Sega Genesis], but felt that having different characters with varying attributes wouldn't fit well with the classic feel of this game. So, we opted for more modes to keep the player enjoying the game long after they beat it.

TH: We definitely didn't want this game to be a remake or a rehash of past glories. So the new-to-old ratio should be similar to any good sequel. If you look at what carried over from Contra to Super C, and then to Contra III, you should have a pretty good idea of what to expect. We definitely pay our dues, but longtime fans will have plenty of new challenges to sink their teeth into.

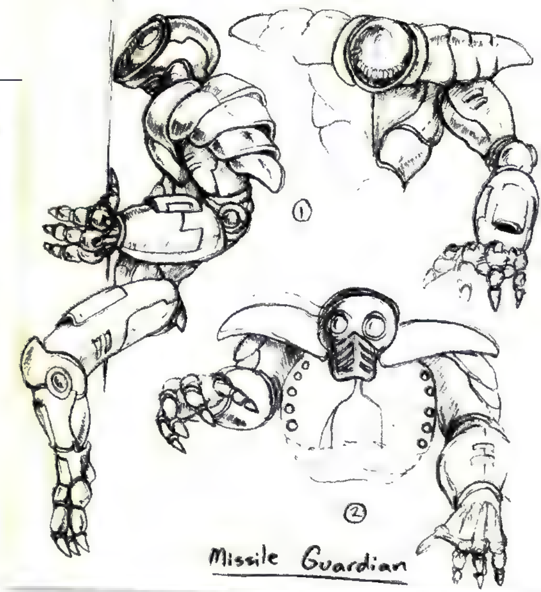
NP: Will the game feature any new weapons or power-ups?

MB: One thing we wanted to do was resolve the "Rapid [power-up] + some weapons = better weapons" thing that didn't make much difference in the original.

SL: Basically, the old standbys are back, some of them sporting a new look. However, this time duplicate weapons "stack," and can be upgraded to a second level of destructive power!

TH: This means your guns get bigger and more useful the longer you survive. Arcade Super Contra did this for the Spread Shot, but we wanted to try it out for everything.

MB: We also borrowed the SNES game's two-handed approach to weapons, and added "discarding," which is a fun way to work together by tossing power-ups to your buddy.



Above:
The mechanoid in this concept art is another of the many massive enemies the heroes will face. "We threw in a kooky robot, which seems to be necessary in every Contra game," comments director Matt Bozon.

NP: Did you build everything from the ground up or did you have access to the old Contra assets?

MB: We created everything from scratch, though we did borrow some art here and there to prototype.

SL: 8-bit Bill and Lance look a little silly standing next to their shirtless, 32-bit brethren anyway. . . .

TH: . . .Of course, certain assets might be lying around if you know where to look.

NP: What kind of a feeling were you aiming for with the visuals? Did nostalgia factor into the visual design?

SL: One of the primary themes of this game is a "return to basics." Following that, the main philosophy we followed when it came to design was: make it familiar but do not copy. That said, there were elements we specifically wanted to keep closer in appearance to their series counterparts. For example, you may have noticed Bill and Lance are back to their old shirtless ways.

TH: There was a lot of pressure, especially from Konami Japan, to make sure the visual style of Contra 4 matched the previous titles. I'm proud to say that from the very first character sprites, all worries vanished. We even received positive comments from Nakazato-san, the director of Contra III! Which isn't to say the pressure is off, of course. Simon and I are very picky about the graphics, and I know Matt is working extrahard to make sure his team produces the best work they can.

MB: I certainly am! Our approach to visuals isn't to duplicate the ridged tiles or soft blue-and-gold colors of the SNES game, but instead to use the louder colors of the NES versions. We took a more painted approach to the backgrounds and large bosses. And, since WayForward is known far and wide for character animation, we brought full animation to the brand in places that wouldn't kill the response time.

NP: What will the soundtrack be like? Will there be any familiar Contra tunes?

MB: Jake Kaufman (who we worked with on Shantae) is on board for music. His take on the Contra themes is fantastic. We've been listening to the music as we work, and the new songs are really growing on me.

TH: Fans will notice familiar melodies, but we also wanted to create brand-new music. It's my sincere hope that cover bands of the future mine Contra 4 for material. If I catch our songs on [website] OC Remix, I'll be satisfied.

NP: Contra's always been known for its brutal difficulty. What kind of difficulty options will be available, and are you concerned about appealing to less-hard-core players?

MB: We've followed the SNES difficulty very closely so far. Hard-core fans will be able to beat the game on hard mode, but beginners will definitely need to sit that out. Hey, that's what easy is for, right?

SL: Like Matt said, we'll have easy, normal, and hard settings. Our goal for normal mode is that it cannot be easier than the original NES Contra. Anything less would be a disservice to the Contra heritage.

TH: I say make it as difficult as we can get away with.

NP: Will players be able to use the Konami Code?

MB: What's the Konami Code?

SL: Oh right; how does that go again? Up, up, left foot, right foot, and you shake it all about. . . .

TH: I guess there's only one way to find out!

FLIGHT OF FANTASY

We crash the Square Enix Party in Tokyo to check out the amazing lineup of upcoming titles from the industry's premiere RPG studio.

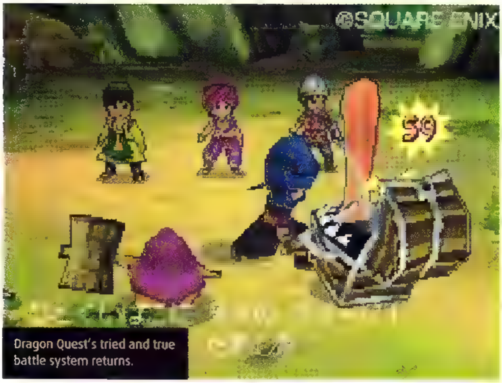
If you own a modern Nintendo platform (which is a pretty safe assumption given the publication you're currently perusing), and you have an affinity for RPGs in all of their various incarnations, then the next couple of years are going to be very good to you thanks to the talented development teams at Square Enix. Read on for the latest about the company's heaping helping of role-playing goodness headed to the Wii and DS.

DRAGON QUEST IX: GUARDIANS OF THE STARRY SKY

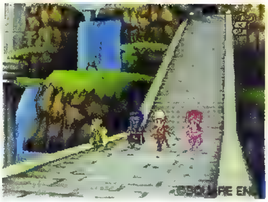
Dragon Quest IX appeared only in the form of a brief trailer, but we had a chance to talk with series creator Yuji Horii about the next installment in his legendary role-playing series. Asked about the controversial decision to develop the game exclusively for DS, Horii responded, "With Dragon Quest IX, our main goal was to create a game that you can play along with your friends. But the infrastructure of putting a typical network game together involves a lot of hurdles: cost, technical challenges, and the like. The DS offers multiplayer network gaming all in one little package. It's easy for the developers and players alike. With the DS, you can just grab your system and go on an adventure with your friends." He wasn't ready to go into specifics regarding the Wi-Fi play, but assured us that the team is working on a lot of interesting ideas. "It's going to be good," the director said with a laugh.

When the game was unveiled late last year, much was also made of the apparent switch to a real-time battle system. But the trailer at the Square Enix party revealed a return to the franchise's turn-based roots. "The first time we showed the game, the battle system was still very much in development," explains Horii. "We just wanted to kind of put it out there and see how people would react. But now, as you saw, it's a command-oriented system with the usual DQ style. So this time, we were able to really show what the game's going to be looking like and what the battle system's going to be like in action."

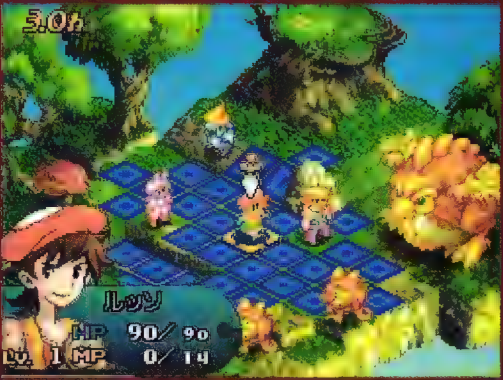
—Steve T.

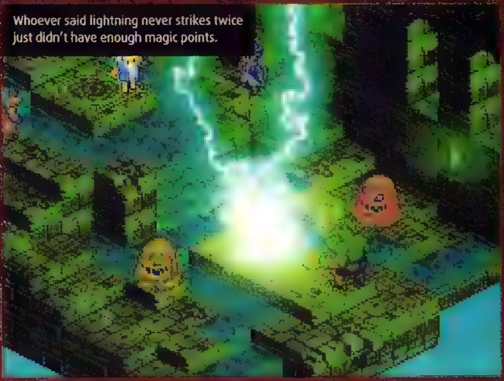


Dragon Quest's tried and true battle system returns.



まものつかいのふく
©SQUARE ENIX




Whoever said lightning never strikes twice just didn't have enough magic points.

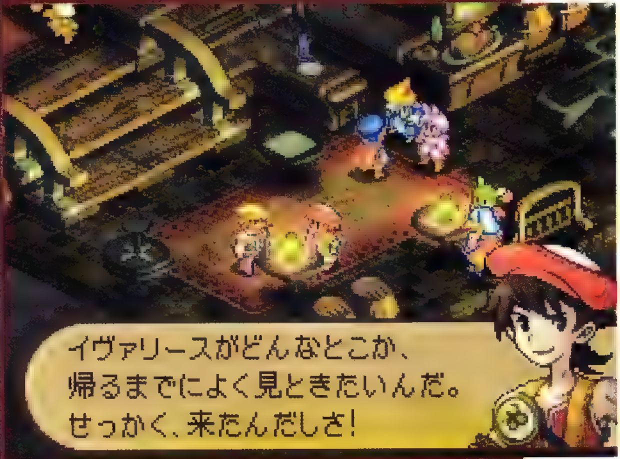
FINAL FANTASY TACTICS A2

The sequel to Final Fantasy Tactics Advance retains many of its predecessor's defining characteristics. The turn-based battles take place on an isometric grid, the story is a light-hearted tale of a boy who finds himself transported to the fantastical world of Ivalice, and your units can learn a wide variety of "jobs" that impart them with unique skills and abilities. A number of modifications and improvements prevent it from feeling like a mere retread, however. The most obvious is that the move to DS allows you to keep an eye on your inventory, character stats, and other pertinent information on the top screen while the battles play out on the bottom screen. Though it hadn't yet been implemented in the version of the game that we played, you'll also be able to command your units via the stylus.

As in the previous title, you'll stop by the local pub to accept missions (and to subsequently pick up your reward should you emerge victorious), but not all of your tasks in A2 involve vanquishing opposing forces. Minigames and other diversions have been added to help prevent the player from suffering war fatigue. The law system has been altered significantly as well; no more going to prison for breaking the rules stated at the beginning of a fight. Judges now grant your party some particular advantage–disallowing enemies from attacking you with fire magic, for example–and the punishment for disobeying the law is to lose that advantage. Other new stuff includes five additional races, 10 to 15 new jobs, and a significant visual upgrade. The sprite work is vibrant and intricately detailed, and in true Final Fantasy fashion, over-the-top summon spells provide plenty of spectacular fireworks.

> **The sprite work is vibrant and intricately detailed, and in true Final Fantasy fashion, over-the-top summon spells provide plenty of awe-inspiring fireworks.**

One of the big complaints about the GBA game was that the introduction seemed to go on and on forever. (Snowball fight, anyone?) That early pacing is something that director Yuichi Murasawa and his team have addressed for the sequel. "In the previous title, the introduction gave the player a pretty comprehensive background on each character," says Murasawa. "This time, the adventure starts much more quickly, and we'll let the player learn about the characters as the game unfolds." The director notes that while our hero, a young boy named Ruso, wishes to return to his own world eventually, he's excited about the prospect of exploring a new land and embarking on an adventure. That youthful spirit, says Murasawa, is at the heart of the game. —Steve T.


イヴァリースがどんなとこか、
帰るまでによく見ときたいんだ。
せっかく、来たんだしさ!

IT'S A WONDERFUL WORLD

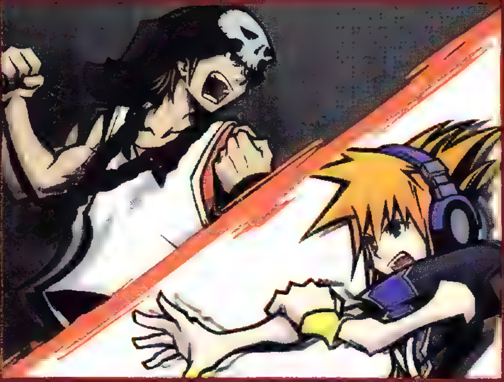
One morning, 15-year-old Neku wakes up to find that his home neighborhood of Shibuya—a real-life district in downtown Tokyo—has been infested by monstrous creatures called the Noize. What's worse, he receives a phone call from the shadowy Shinigami organization informing him that he must participate in Death's Game, a seven-day challenge that will erase him from existence should he fail. Not exactly the cheery scenario one expects from a game called It's a Wonderful World, eh? "The contrast between the title and the dark themes is something that the development team is really concentrating on," explains director Tatsuya Kando. "We want Neku to realize or hope for a wonderful world through the experiences he'll go through in the game."

The setup is far from the only unorthodox thing about this highly creative action-RPG. During battle, the game puts your multitasking skills to the test by requiring you to control two characters at once. Neku occupies the bottom screen, dispatching various psychic attacks as you slash and tap at enemies with the stylus. Meanwhile, one of his partners handles foes on the top screen via specific command strings using the Control Pad and face buttons. It seems ludicrously unwieldy at first, but once you get into a rhythm, the game's kinetic energy completely absorbs you—as does the stylish presentation, which boasts a graffiti-inspired urban aesthetic reminiscent of Sega's Jet Set Radio. (The character designs are by Kingdom Hearts mastermind Tetsuya Nomura, who is also serving as producer on the title.) Lending the dual-screened skirmishes a bit of extra depth, Neku can earn badges—either by defeating certain enemies or purchasing them from shops—that bestow him with new abilities. The hero can equip six at a time, and Kando claims that there will be about 300 badges in total.

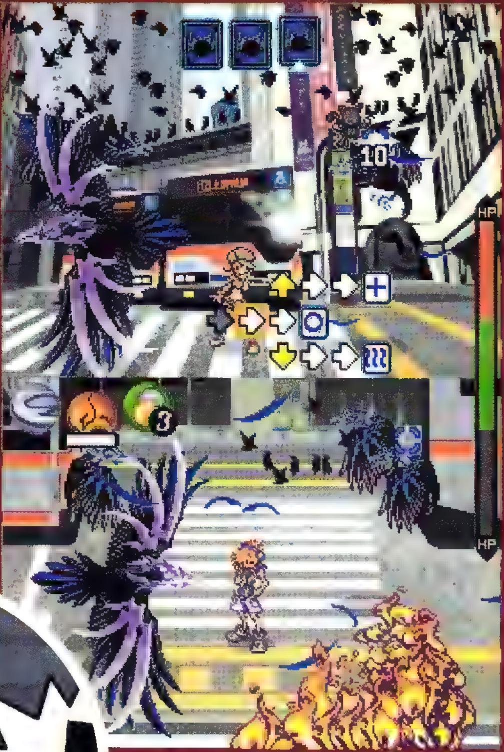
> **"The contrast between the title and the dark themes is something that the development team is really concentrating on."** —Tatsuya Kando

Though the emphasis is on combat, there is an adventure aspect as well. Neku's psychic abilities allow him to read the thoughts of Shibuya's citizens, and he'll often be compelled to help them solve problems in their lives (which we suspect plays a major part in realizing Kando's wonderful world). Unfortunately, the playable demo at the event didn't showcase this element of the game, but that did little to hamper our enthusiasm for this offbeat gem. There's nothing else quite like it on the DS (or any system, for that matter), and it's refreshing to see Square Enix try something wholly original among the tidal wave of Final Fantasies and Dragon Quests.

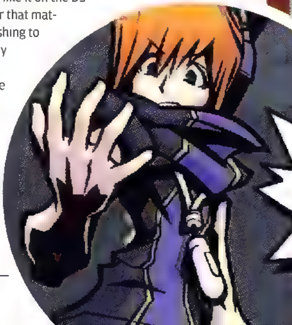
—Steve T.



The contemporary character designs are a bit of a departure from Nomura's [illegible] work [illegible]



Yes, It's a Wonderful World is every bit as chaotic as it looks. Once you get a handle [illegible], though, [illegible] a frenetic blast.



DRAGON QUEST MONSTERS: JOKER

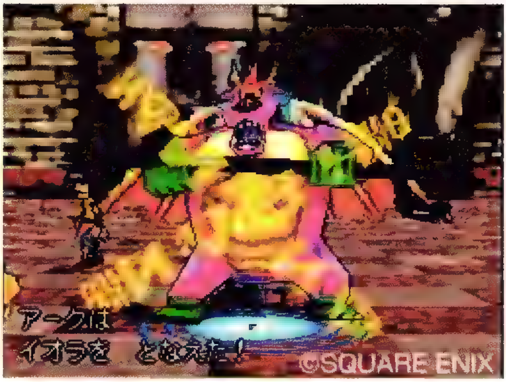
Toward the end of last year, we got our first chance to see what we hope is a long legacy of Dragon Quest games on DS in Rocket Slime. It was a great game in its own right, but it wasn't the hard-core RPG that we're used to from the storied franchise. But Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker, coming this fall, will give us something closer to what we were expecting.

Sort of a hybrid between a traditional RPG and a Pokémon-style monster-collecting game, Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker looks to serve up a lighter-weight offering than the usual series fare, however. You play as the eponymous Joker, a young man charged with the task of becoming the world's best monster trainer. If you've played a Dragon Quest game before, you'll recognize plenty of the monsters from the series, such as the ubiquitous Slimes. Like in so many Pokémon games, you're given one monster toward the beginning of your adventure; to round out your party, you must scout your enemies for potential teammates. You can also breed new monsters by mating the existing members of your party.

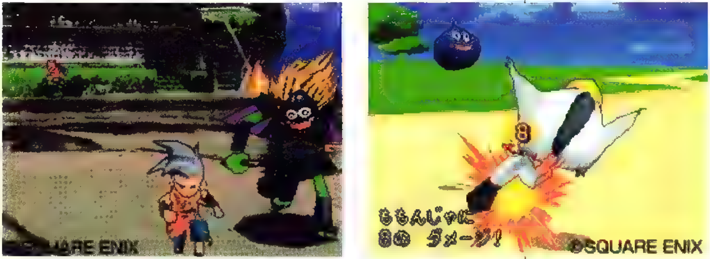
You explore the picturesque 3-D world by walking around using the Control Pad; the A Button interacts with objects you encounter and the X Button brings up your team's status menu. You watch the action via an over-the-shoulder camera on the top screen; a persistent, birds-eye map lets you keep track of your position at all times. You'll use the touch screen to navigate menus but you won't perform any complex touch-controlled gestures.

The battles in Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker aren't random—you'll see wild monsters all over as you roam around the world. You can initiate a battle when you run into a creature, but the main character never actually fights. Combat is completely the domain of the team's monsters. You can have a maximum of three monsters in your fighting party, so choosing which monsters you enter combat with is important. You assign strategies to each monster individually, and they carry them out as they see fit for each situation. Toward the beginning of the adventure, the battles are pretty straightforward and don't require much meddling during the melee. But as you delve deeper into the story, you'll need to be way more hands-on with the battle system, tweaking your monsters' tactics as each battle takes shape. As your team earns experience, you'll be able to teach your monsters new techniques and skills that they can employ in battles.

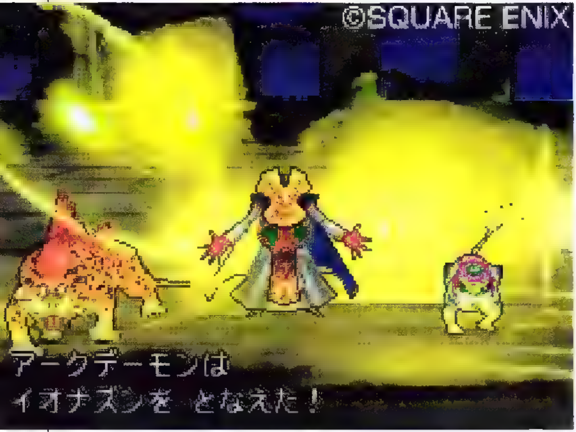
In addition to the main adventure mode, there's a mode that lets you form teams to battle head-to-head with other players via local wireless. There may also be some online functionality via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. It hasn't been confirmed how Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection will work in the United States, but in Japan you can upload your team to a server, where it is compared to other teams that have been uploaded. Ten teams are then downloaded to your DS for you to battle; you can receive prizes in the form of in-game items and new monsters for each battle you win. We'll find out much more as we get closer to Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker's launch later this year. —CHRIS S.



You can adjust the combat strategies before and during battles, such as whether a monster attacks the easiest enemies first, conserves its magic consumption, or spends its rounds supporting its teammates.



Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker displays vibrant 3-D visuals while you're walking around the expansive world and when you're battling dangerous . . . Slimes.



The human characters don't fight; instead, they send monsters into battle to do their dirty work for them.

FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: THE CRYSTAL BEARERS

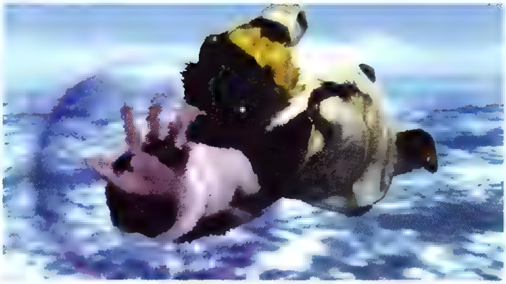
Though The Crystal Bearers was shown only in video form, it was clear that the game has changed quite a bit from its E3 2006 debut. The trailer portrayed a much more technologically advanced world, with mechanical airships seeming to play a prominent role. We had no idea just how much it had changed, however, until we spoke with director Toshiyuki Itahana. "For Crystal Bearers, the focus is completely on solo play," reveals Itahana (who is also the character designer for the series). "It's a story-centric, action-based role-playing game."

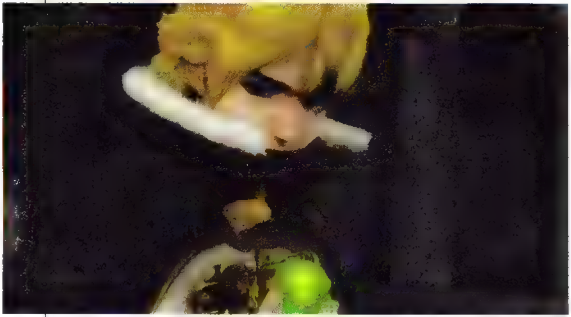
> **"We wanted to take a bit of a departure with the story. It's not the usual kind of hero tale that you would expect from a Final Fantasy."** —Toshiyuki Itahana

That narrative element is something that Itahana seems to be passionate about. "The game takes place in the Crystal Chronicles world, and includes the four races from the original title," he says. "But we wanted to take a bit of a departure with the story. It's not the usual kind of hero tale that you would expect from a Final Fantasy, or especially from Crystal Chronicles, where the protagonist starts out weaker, younger, and less experienced, and then turns into this great hero as you progress. That's the classic route. For this game, we wanted a more mature hero. He starts out as a much more complete hero. We can't get into too much detail about the story, but it starts with this already-established hero getting drawn into the game's events."

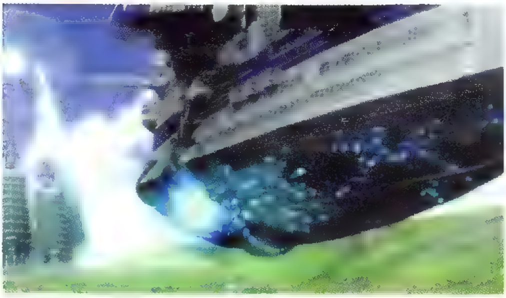
Almost everything about The Crystal Bearers remains similarly shrouded in secrecy, but Itahana says to expect a wide variety of functions for the Wii remote, including flying an airship, firing weapons, and casting magic. The director gave one other rather intriguing and cryptic example: "This game is following in the Final Fantasy tradition of being very story-driven, with lots of cinematic events for the player to enjoy. And to be able to incorporate action into that aspect of it via the Wii remote is something that we found to be an innovative approach to the series."

Rest assured we'll keep a close eye on this one. To check out the trailer for yourself, go to www.ffccnews.jp/2007/05/85.html. —Steve T.





Leave it to Square Enix to show what a piece of hardware is truly capable of. The trailer for The Crystal Bearers consists entirely of real-time footage and it looks fantastic.



FINAL FANTASY IV

Following on the heels of Final Fantasy III—a DS remake of a Famicom game that had never before been released in the States—Square Enix recently revealed that the more-story-driven Final Fantasy IV is getting a similar treatment. The news isn't quite as exciting, as FFIV has been released on multiple platforms over the years, but the game is considered one of the best in the series and its remake looks stellar, boasting a significant visual update. How Square Enix plans to up the ante from FFIII remains to be seen. (Voice acting, perhaps? "You spoony Bard!"), but we can't wait to relive the quest of Cecil and company in glorious 3-D. —Andy M.

CHOCOBO'S DUNGEON

To commemorate the tenth anniversary of the original Chocobo's Dungeon title (which was never released in the US), Square Enix announced an all-new installment in the franchise, exclusively for Wii. Details are scarce, but producer Yuki Yokoyama assured us that it won't be "just a dungeon game" and that it should appeal to a wider audience than its predecessors. The brief trailer showcased a visual style similar to the recent Chocobo Tales (albeit considerably spruced up, of course), and Yokoyama promised that there would be "something special" in Chocobo's Dungeon for fans of the DS game. —Steve T.

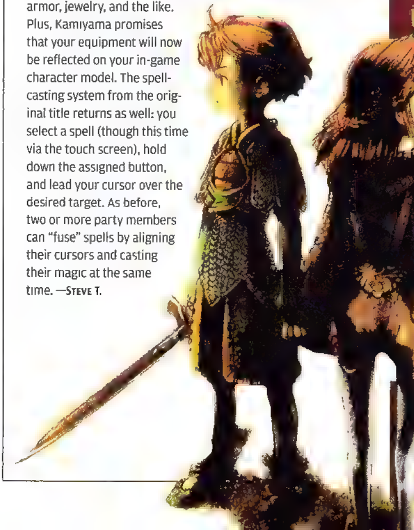
FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES: RING OF FATES

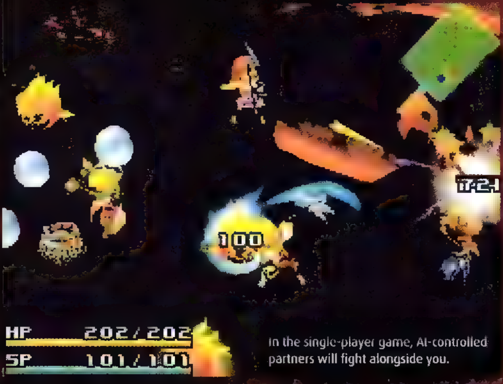
For those of you who played the original Crystal Chronicles on GameCube, let's get your big question out of the way: in Ring of Fates, nobody is saddled with lugging around a magical chalice to protect the party from an atmospheric poison. "That aspect of the first game was sort of an element of necessity," admits Ring of Fates director Mitsuru Kamiyama. "The game operated on one screen, and we needed that element to keep all of the players together. Now, with each user playing on his or her own DS, we're able to get rid of the chalice. We learned the lessons of the past. We want to create a much freer environment in the new game."

Another big focus for Kamiyama's team is to make the single-player mode more compelling. It that regard, it feels a bit more like a traditional Final Fantasy title than its predecessor. The gameplay is still very action-heavy, with lots of jumping around and hacking at enemies, but there's a marked shift toward more-copious amounts of dialogue (which is often fully voiced) and character development. The tale centers around two innocent young twins, Yuri and Chelinka, who must reluctantly leave their friends and family behind to embark on a fated journey. What we've seen so far is quite endearing, aided greatly by the ever-charming character designs of Toshiyuki Itahana. Kumi Tanioka, the woman responsible for the first game's memorable soundtrack, also returns as composer.

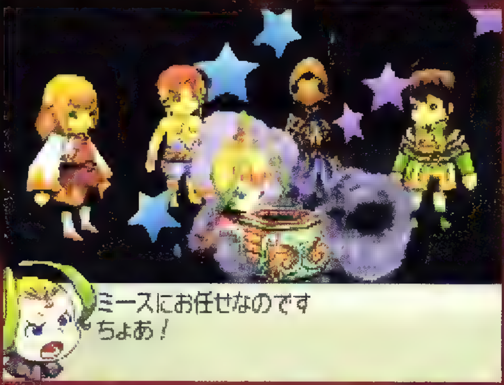
The increased emphasis on storytelling means that the main quest will be a strictly solitary affair. "We did that intentionally, because we wanted the multiplayer to be more gameplay-focused," explains Kamiyama. "We felt that when you're sitting around with friends, you probably just want to play and not watch story scenes." That doesn't mean multiplayer is taking a back seat, however; on the contrary, Ring of Fates will offer a multitude of both cooperative and head-to-head modes for up to four players. Unfortunately, Wi-Fi play isn't part of the plan at this time.

Fans of the GCN game's deep item-creation system will be delighted to know that you can once again craft all manner of armor, jewelry, and the like. Plus, Kamiyama promises that your equipment will now be reflected on your in-game character model. The spell-casting system from the original title returns as well: you select a spell (though this time via the touch screen), hold down the assigned button, and lead your cursor over the desired target. As before, two or more party members can "fuse" spells by aligning their cursors and casting their magic at the same time. —STEVE T.





In the single-player game, AI-controlled partners will fight alongside you.



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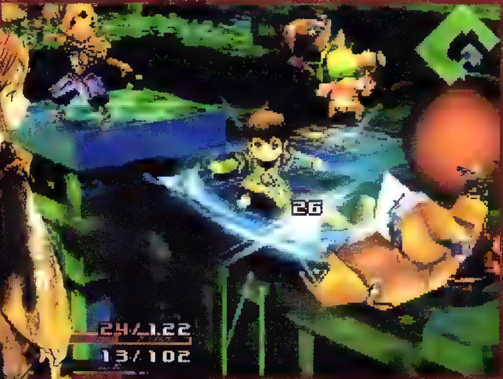
ちょあ！



Ring of Fates [illegible] to the overall look and feel of the original Crystal Chronicles than does The Crystal Bearers. Most of the development team for RoF worked on the first game.

DRAGON QUEST SWORDS: THE MASKED QUEEN AND THE TOWER OF MIRRORS

About a year after it was first announced at E3 2006, we finally got some hands-on time with Dragon Quest Swords. As expected, the game is all about wielding the Wii remote like a blade to cut down monsters many and varied. Here's how it works: after using the pointer and pressing the A Button to place a targeting reticule on the screen, you can start swinging the remote vertically, horizontally, or diagonally. Each swipe will cross at the specified coordinates, which is crucial because the enemies line up in all sorts of different formations, and taking out multiple baddies at once is the key to successful swordplay. You can also defend yourself by pressing the B Button to raise your shield, then moving the remote to block incoming attacks. Against certain types of monsters, deflecting a blow will stagger your adversary, leaving him open to a counterattack.

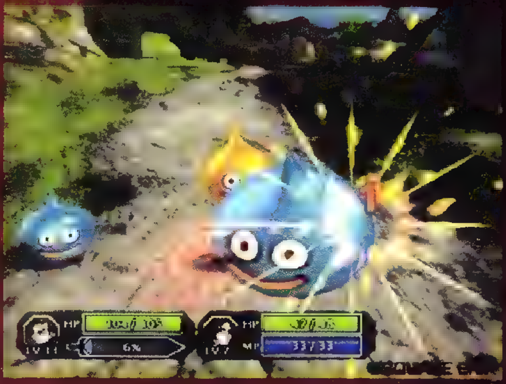
Though the game features a number of basic RPG elements, such as leveling up, buying items, and equipping armor, the experience takes place primarily on rails. You press up on the Control Pad to move forward, and deviate from forging straight ahead only when presented with the occasional branch in your path (at which point you'll choose simply whether to proceed left or right). In order to keep things simple—and thus appeal to a wide audience—the development team decided against using the nunchuk. They also didn't want the wire getting in the way when you swing the remote.

The game is all about wielding the Wii remote like a blade to cut down monsters many and varied.

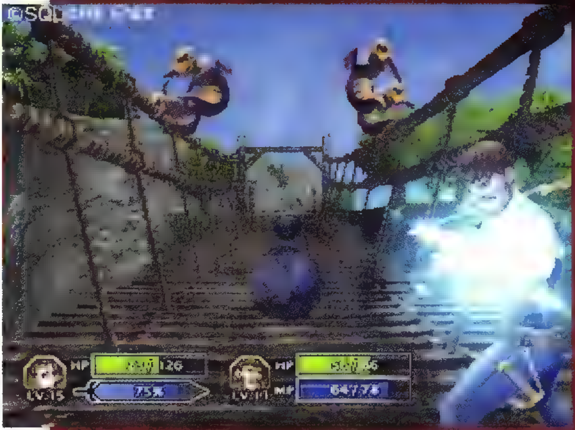
The adventure is divided into quests, with a town serving as your central hub. Should you find a new quest too difficult, you can go back to a previous area to do a bit of good old-fashioned level-grinding. Additionally, you have the ability to create your own weapons, and before each quest, you can choose a partner to lend a helping hand. Your female compatriot in the demo, for example, would cast a healing spell when the hero's health got perilously low.

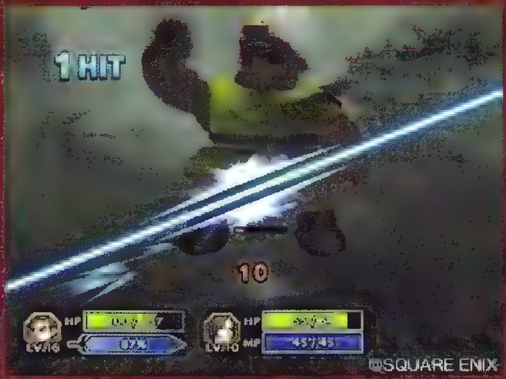
One of the better-looking titles on Wii, Swords boasts some impressive lighting, sharp texture quality, and the best renditions we've yet seen of Akira Toriyama's classic Dragon Quest monsters. The most impactful visual moments occur during special magic attacks, which are executed using various gestures. By swirling the remote overhead, for instance, you can conjure a storm cloud to rain bolts of lightning down on your foes.

Dragon Quest Swords isn't for the battle-hardened RPG veteran, but it should be a great entry point to the genre for the young would-be adventurer. —Steve T.



They may look adorable, but th[illegible] everything you stand for. Get 'em.





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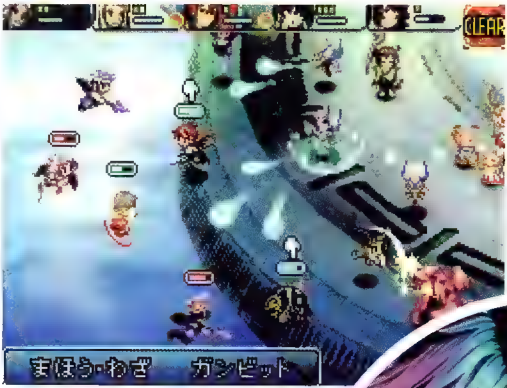
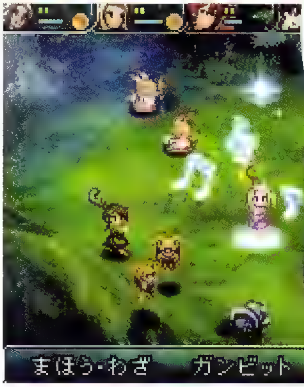
FINAL FANTASY XII: REVENANT WINGS



The battlefield itself is an important strategic consideration as some units are much more effective than others in certain environments.

Last year's critically acclaimed Final Fantasy XII made waves by eschewing a number of series traditions, particularly with regard to the battle system. It seems fitting, then, that the follow-up to that title should stand as a similarly radical departure. More real-time strategy game than RPG, the DS-exclusive Revenant Wings is definitely its own beast. You still control a party of named characters (who can equip weapons and armor, use items, etc.), but the bulk of your forces consist of summoned monsters. Each type of creature costs a different number of Summon Points to conjure, with the more-powerful classes, obviously, commanding a steeper price. Much of the strategy thus comes from choosing the right mix of combatants for the skirmish at hand. Eventually your army will grow quite large, but a modified version of FFXII's Gambit system lets you map out special abilities for certain characters so that they'll utilize them automatically during battle. The game also features stylus controls, which makes commanding your units a breeze.

Set approximately one year after the events of Final Fantasy XII, the Revenant Wings story follows the continuing adventures of Vaan and Penelo as they set out to become sky pirates. The duo's journey through the newly peaceful skies of Ivalice leads them to an uncharted sky continent named Lemures. They'll make a number of new acquaintances along the way, and run into a few familiar faces as well (including everyone's favorite sky pirate, Balthier). The overall tone seems considerably lighter than that of its predecessor, with an emphasis on exploration rather than political intrigue. It looks to be an engrossing tale regardless, especially if you played the first game and formed an attachment to these characters.



Penelo proves that nothing soothes the savage beast like the power of music. That and a billowy pair of pantaloons.

Visually, Revenant Wings is stunning, mixing polygonal environments with hand-drawn character sprites to superb effect. Whatever voodoo Square Enix is using to induce these kinds of graphics on the DS, they need to share it with the rest of the development community. The occasional CG cut-scene serves up even more eye candy, and the entire presentation is pulled together beautifully by Hitoshi Sakimoto's soundtrack. The US version of the game is due this winter, and will feature a number of tweaks to the Japanese release. Foremost among them is a spike in difficulty; Revenant Wings was positioned as a sort of "My first Final Fantasy" in its country of origin, and Square Enix wants the North American version to better appeal to hard-core fans. —Steve T.

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NINJA MASTER

We sit down with Team Ninja boss Tomonobu Itagaki to discuss Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword, the studio's future, and why he can kick your butt at Pikmin 2.

By Steve Thomason

Nintendo Power: I understand that Dragon Sword takes places after Ninja Gaiden for Xbox. Can you talk a little bit about the story setup and what's going on with Ryu at the beginning of this game?

Tomonobu Itagaki: Dragon Sword details what happens six months after what we call the Vigor incident, which covers the events of the first Ninja Gaiden for Xbox. The Vigor incident was basically when Ryu Hayabusa went to the Vigor Empire to stop the fiends from taking over. To give you some information that we haven't really told anybody else, there are different sects of fiends, fiends being the monsters that are the main enemy in Ninja Gaiden. So, the Vigor Empire contained one particular sect that was trying to gain power. By the same token, there are various clans of ninja that are vying for power, one of which is Hayabusa's clan. This game takes place right after this incident that changed the balance of power amongst both the fiends and the ninja clans.

NP: Can you tell us anything about the female ninja in the game?

TI: She plays a very important part in the story. She's basically someone who is part of Hayabusa's clan and lives in his village. She's kind of his friend or comrade, if you will.

NP: Will she be playable?

TI: Yeah, of course.

NP: How is the game divided between the two characters? Will they each have their own scenario?

TI: You'll actually play the first chapter of the game as her.

NP: Can you talk at all about her move set or some of the differences between her and Ryu in terms of gameplay?

TI: She can do a lot of the same basic things, but obviously, not being as experienced as Hayabusa, she might not be able to do a lot of the more advanced moves. She's still in training.

NP: Who else is working on the game with you, and what titles have they worked on previously?

TI: They're all ace pilots, people that have been working with me for over 10 years. It's a very trustworthy team. The main programmer on the game is someone who worked on the fighting engines for both Dead or Alive and Ninja Gaiden, back since the very beginning. Our head artist is a guy who I can say without doubt is a genius. The designers, as well, are people who have worked with me for years, back since the team started. It's definitely a team that we can be proud of.

NP: This is Team Ninja's first handheld game. Why did you want to work on a handheld title, and why did you choose the DS?

TI: First of all, we wanted to challenge ourselves with a new endeavor. Having, we believe, pretty much revolutionized both the fighting-game and action-game genres, we felt it was time to step into a new arena with portable games. That's something I really wanted to try. I had thought about making an FPS for home consoles, but I thought, "You know, there are plenty of good games out there. Maybe it would just be better if I stayed a participant in those rather than try to do it myself." I would rather challenge something on a new piece of hardware; something that's going to surprise people and make them say, "Wow, look what they were able to do with this." That's why I chose to make a portable game.

It wasn't a financial decision. It wasn't simply because the DS was selling so well that we wanted to make a game for the DS. It's because I genuinely thought that this was the best platform to use, and I like the hardware.

NP: Yeah, I remember that Team Ninja announced that they were working on a DS title way back before the system was even released.

TI: Yes. Some people might think it's silly, but we're very clear on what we need to do. That's why, as you say, we announced a game for the hardware back before it was even released, and who knew if it was going to succeed or not. You can release a game for a piece of hardware that's doing great and it still might not sell, or you can release a great game for a piece of hardware that isn't doing too well and still sell a lot of copies. So that's not really our motivation. It's more looking at the strengths of the hardware and saying, "Well that's the platform we want to develop for, regardless of its install base."

NP: What did you decide first: that you wanted to do Ninja Gaiden for DS or that you wanted to do a stylus-controlled game?

TI: It was definitely to do a stylus-controlled game. The stylus was the main reason I was attracted to this hardware. Since this was our first portable game and our first game for the DS, I knew that I was probably going to have to ask for the help of one of my franchises in order to make this a success. So the question was, "Do I ask for Hayabusa's help, or do I ask for Kasumi's help?" And I debated that for a while, but making a game for the DS with the stylus functionality definitely came first.

NP: We haven't seen a lot of action titles on the DS that take advantage of the stylus to the extent that Ninja Gaiden does. Why do you think that is, and has it been challenging to translate that quick, precise style of gameplay to the touch screen?

TI: I think it's only natural to want to do something with the stylus, because if you look at the strengths of the hardware, that's your biggest strength. So focusing on that element seems pretty intuitive to me. From a technical perspective, there are a lot of difficulties in reading what the player is trying to do using the touch screen and translating that to what the character does in the game. So we've developed some quite sophisticated technology in order to do that.

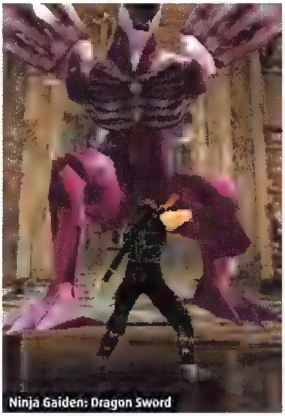
Obviously, we've gone with a pretty edgy philosophy with our design, trying to do everything using the stylus. I think other developers or product managers would probably think that was too risky. They wouldn't know if they could pull it off. But that's one of Team Ninja's trademarks; to challenge new areas of game development. Since this is the first game by Team Ninja on the DS, people are going to wonder what it's going to be like. So we have to not only meet, but exceed those expectations. That's why we've tried to challenge a new paradigm using the stylus for action. Because if we made a game that used only the Control Pad and the buttons, our fans would be upset. They'd say, "Well, it's just like every other DS game on the market."

> **"Obviously, we've gone with a pretty edgy philosophy with our design, trying to do everything using the stylus. But that's one of Team Ninja's trademarks; to challenge new areas of game development."**

NP: When we talked to you a couple of months ago, we asked you what the most important elements of an action game are, and you talked a lot about the responsiveness and sensitivity of the controls. Do you have to approach that differently with this new input method than you would with buttons? And is one kind of input inherently better than the other for an action game, or do they each have their own strengths and weaknesses?

TI: From my own personal observations, I think that for a casual gamer or someone who may not be totally versed in all of the intricacies of the control, you can get three or four times as much depth of gameplay out of a system like this. Let's say you have a hundred moves. With a Control Pad, they may not be able to go through all of the different motions or execute all of the commands that are necessary to utilize those 100 moves. But with the DS, you can have simple, intuitive controls and still be able to do a huge number of amazing actions. And that's what we've focused on.

NP: Do you have to take a different approach in terms of pacing and level design for a handheld game?



Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword

TI: Yeah, I think you do. And to be honest, since this is our first foray into the portable-gaming world, I think that we're kind of playing it by ear as we go along. We're examining all of those different things and figuring out what works on a portable and what doesn't. You know, for someone who's been making games for more than 10 years, it's still challenging when you're doing something completely new for the first time. It's just a question now of going in and looking at what works. That's currently what we're in the middle of doing.

NP: What are some of your personal favorite DS games, and are there any that have inspired you or that you feel really take full advantage of the hardware?

TI: I thought that Animal Crossing was pretty interesting. This is sort of a technological point of view, but I think the way in which they used polygons to represent all of the backgrounds was interesting. They used rounded, almost sculpted types of polygons to show it off in the best way they could using the power available. I think that was a very smooth technique. This is kind of coming from a programmer's perspective, but back in the days of the Nintendo 64, when we didn't have nearly as much hardware power as we have today, we had to come up with all sorts of tricks and little techniques to make the best visuals using the power available. So when I look at Animal Crossing for DS, I kind of think back to those days and think, "Wow, this is pretty amazing, what they were able to do." That was pretty stimulating to me.

NP: Ninja Gaiden is certainly shaping up to be one of the most visually impressive games on the DS. Are there any special tricks that you're employing to get these amazing results?

TI: Like I said earlier, everyone on the team is an ace, so we're going in and using every trick we have in the book to make the game look as good as it does. I hope that when people get their hands on it, they'll say, "Wow, I didn't know that you could do something like this on the DS!"

NP: That's certainly been our impression!

TI: [Laughs] I think it's just amazing that such a small machine has so much capability.

NP: Will Dragon Sword feature any Wi-Fi functionality?

TI: We don't have anything planned.

NP: Why do you think that the handheld market has really exploded in recent years? By and large, handhelds are outselling consoles right now. What do you think is the reason for that?

TI: One thing I think is that portable systems are a little bit more easily approachable. And it's something you can look at and say, "This is my device and this is my time." You can fit in little slices of time here and there

Itagaki considered choosing Kasumi for his DS debut.

that you can use to play. I think that's where the portable systems stand out. Also, perhaps people have become more accepting of games in general as a part of their daily lives. Sometimes it can go the other way, as well, being a little bit on the negative side; you see five kids together and you want them to go and play tag or something, but instead they all have their own portable systems and they're all playing in their own separate worlds.

NP: You've made a critically acclaimed fighting-game series and a critically acclaimed action-game series. You mentioned that you had an interest in making a first-person shooter . . . are there any other genres that you'd like to tackle?

TI: It's always a difficult question when you're talking about developing something new, because there's a ton of things that I'd like to try. The reason I was interested in an FPS is because they provide a portrait of war and conflict, which is a theme that I have interest in. That's why I make fighting games or action games that have fighting elements. An FPS, to me, always looks like a portrait of a certain scene inside of a conflict. That's kind of where my interest in that genre started. In terms of the core game mechanics, though, maybe an FPS is a little bit too simple for me to do. In fact, I might prefer to do something in the real-time strategy genre. Battalion Wars for GameCube was just an amazing example of how to implement something that's like an RTS on a console. That was a good experience for me. Usually when I play games, I can't help but analyze them from a professional perspective, but that was one where I was able to remain just as a player.

NP: Are you looking forward to the Wii sequel?

TI: Yeah, I'd also like Nintendo to bring out a new Pikmin. [Laughs] I'm a professional when it comes to Pikmin. I know everything there is to know about that game. You go up against me head-to-head in Pikmin 2, and I'll show you who's boss. [Laughs] I've probably played somewhere between 500 and 700 matches.

NP: What is it about Pikmin that appeals to you so much?

TI: It's almost like an RTS in a way. One of the things that's most fun about going up against somebody, be it in a video game or something like a board game, is trying to control the number of unpredictable elements. That's why it's boring to have everything be predictable in a fighting game, and why we give Dead or Alive a number of unpredictable elements like falling off of buildings or move reversals and things like that. So that's probably one of the key elements of Pikmin 2—how you deal with the unpredictable things that happen in order to beat your opponent.

Let's say that your capacity for doing work is 10 tasks in one day. But you don't get 10; you get 12 tasks at a time. So unless you adjust, you gradually have tasks piling up. I don't like games where you just go through the motions. I want to have some unpredictability there, and make it so that it's constantly flowing. A game where it's hard to get everything right, but when you do, it feels great.

NP: A lot of people are comparing the Wii to the DS right now in terms of shaking up the market and introducing new experiences. Does the Wii offer a similarly intriguing challenge for you as a developer?

TI: Yeah, I think it's a very interesting piece of hardware, and it'd be interesting for us to challenge that area as well. The Wii has kind of carved its own niche within the home console arena. It's almost in an entire category by itself. I do think that it's totally different from the DS, though.

NP: How do you think a hard-core action title could work with the Wii? What are some of the opportunities there? And by contrast, does it present any unique difficulties?

TI: I think it would depend on how you make it. You would really have to design it for the strengths of the hardware. If you used the kind of control scheme that most developers are using right now for the Wii and tried to do a really hard-core action game, I think people would just throw up their hands and say, "No, we can't deal with that." The Wii has its own reason for existence. If you don't adapt what you're doing to fit that, then there's not much point in bringing an action game to the platform.

Like all of us, Itagaki wants to see these little guys head to Wii.

NP: Do you have any plans for doing an action game on Wii, or is it something that you're interested in?

TI: I'm currently brain-training about that right now. [Laughs]

NP: Has your approach to development changed over the years? Are there any lessons that you learned early on that you apply to your work today?

TI: Of course. Every experience that you have changes your outlook. Every time you do something, you become better at it. So if I include a similar feature in my next game, it should be better than it was the first time. It's really important to have that experience, and I think we're at a point in development now where we need to create a good balance between the veterans who have that experience and the strength and the vigor of the young designers that are coming up. American developers might be surprised that I've spent all of this time on the DS. They might be wondering why I'm focusing on it so much. But I think if they actually come sit down and play the game, they can see where all of that experience is going. I think even from an international perspective, we need to share those experiences.

"Every experience that you have changes your outlook. Every time you do something, you become better at it."

NP: Alright. Thank you so much for your time. Before we go, are there any other secrets that you can divulge regarding Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword, or is there anything else you want our readers to know about the game?

TI: First of all, I have to say that now that Team Ninja has broken the seal for portable development, particularly on the DS; there are a lot of young guys on the team who want to continue making games for the DS. So this won't be the first and last game; you'll be seeing more for the DS from Team Ninja. Also, because this is our first time working on the platform, a lot of your readers probably aren't familiar with our team. I'll just say to them that you can expect not only an amazing game in Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword, but also other unorthodox experiences from us down the road. So hopefully, the people who are already Team Ninja fans will buy a DS and buy this game, and those that are fans of the DS will become Team Ninja fans as well.

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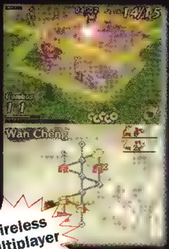
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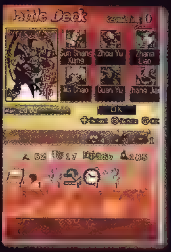
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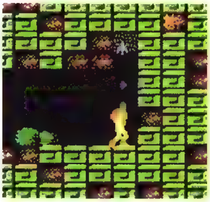
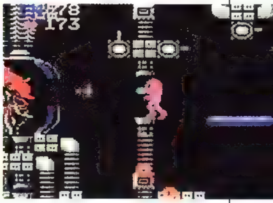
SAMUS TURNS 20

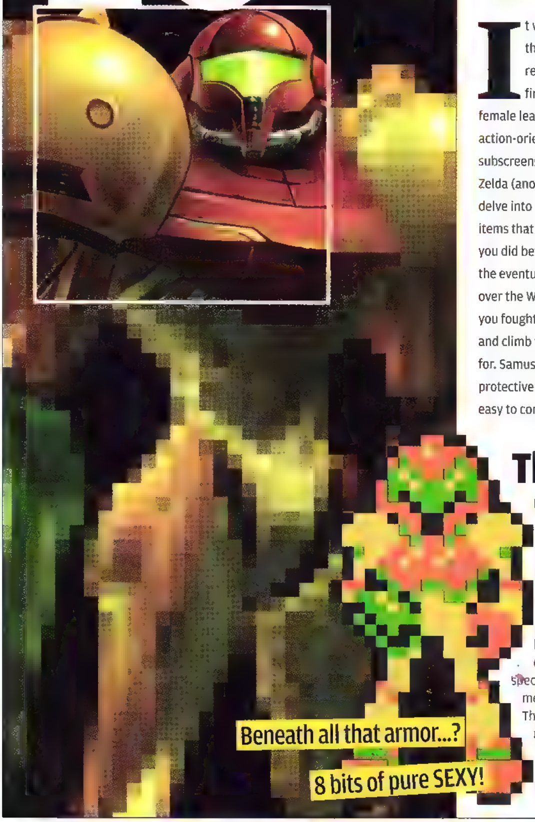
Twenty years ago this summer, Metroid landed on the NES. Aliens were crushed, Samus Aran revealed her true identity, and Justin Bailey became a video game celebrity.

By George Sinfield





It would be hard to imagine the current video game landscape without the original Metroid as one of its guiding lights. Nintendo's 1987 sci-fi release was an open-ended adventure in the era of linear levels, the first password-saved game, and the first major console title with a female lead character (beating Lara Croft by nearly a decade). It took the action-oriented sensibilities of Super Mario Bros. (constant movement, no subscreens or inventories) and added the exploration aspects of The Legend of Zelda (another North American release in 1987) to make a game that you could delve into for days or zip through in a matter of hours. Though there were items that you had to acquire before you could get past certain points, what you did between those points and how prepared you were when you took on the eventual boss battles was up to you. Whether you preferred the Ice Beam over the Wave Beam in a particular situation or wanted more Missiles before you fought the likes of Kraid, Ridley, or the Mother Brain, you could jump, roll, and climb to remote sections of the planet Zebes to find what you were looking for. Samus's arsenal was capped off by the enemy-slicing Screw Attack and the protective Varia suit. But, even with advanced gear, Samus remained just as easy to control with the NES's two buttons and Control Pad.


Beneath all that armor...?
8 bits of pure SEXY!

The Legend of Samus

Metroid has generated more than its share of surprises and rumors. The fact that space hunter Samus is a woman was a secret (the manual used male pronouns to describe her) that was revealed only if you were to complete the game quickly (within five hours to see the character without her helmet or within three hours to see her in a stylish curve-revealing body suit). Another mystery revolved around the game's password system. The "Justin Bailey" password (the words JUSTIN and BAILEY followed by 12 dashes), which let you play with Samus in her advanced state of undress, generated the largest number of rumors as players speculated that the name was a reference to a member of the development team, or an Australian term that meant "just in a swimsuit." The truth is that any number of character combinations nets similar results and the Justin Bailey password held no actual significance. The lesser-known "NAR Password" (NARPAS and SWORD followed by 13 zeros), which makes Samus invincible and all-powerful, may have actually been used in the game's development.

Prime Time

The success of the first title (particularly in North America) has led to several sequels and a series offshoot (Metroid Prime). There has been a Metroid adventure on every Nintendo system since the NES, with two exceptions: the short-lived Virtual Boy and the N64, which embraced 3-D gaming at a time when Metroid was better known as a 2-D franchise. Samus did appear on the N64 in Super Smash Bros., however, and she finally ventured into 3-D in the Metroid Prime series, the third installment of which is coming this August. The Prime titles have expanded the boundaries of first-person games by bringing exploration into the forefront, rather than just fighting endless enemies. The 2-D Metroid titles have also flourished, with Metroid Fusion and origin-story-redux Metroid: Zero Mission carrying the torch on Game Boy Advance. Like many of Nintendo's biggest franchises, the Metroid titles are inspired by gameplay ideas first, with story and character as supporting elements. It's what makes Metroid an enduring classic and a continuing inspiration for games to come.

TIME TRAVEL

October, 1985
The Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) arrives in North America.

Metroid

August, 1987 - With an ability to fit into small spaces and get out of tight scrapes, Samus Aran cleans up Zebes and wins over a legion of fans. A star is born.

August, 1989
The Game Boy ushers in a new era of portable gaming.

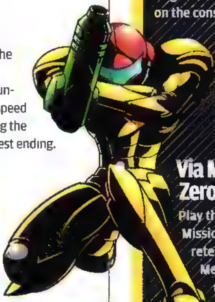
Metroid II: Return of Samus

October, 1991 - Big adventure in a small package—Samus returns with a futuristic adventure on Game Boy. And this time, she flies with the aid of the tricky Space Jump.

August, 1991
The golden age of Nintendo continues with the release of the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES).

Super Metroid

April, 1994 - Often thought of as the crown jewel of the series, Super Metroid impresses players with stunning visuals, deep gameplay, and speed boosting: a vital tool for completing the game in a hurry and earning the best ending.



October, 1996
The N64 debuts, but the world is not yet ready for a 3-D Metroid adventure.

November, 1998
Game Boy Color lights up the gaming world.

June, 2001
Handhelds enter the 21st century with Game Boy Advance.

September, 2001
The introduction of the Nintendo GameCube carries the torch for Nintendo's great-gameplay-first philosophy.

Metroid Prime

November, 2002 - The first full-blown 3-D adventure in the Metroid series puts a new, exploration-heavy focus on first-person-perspective adventures.

Metroid Fusion

November, 2001 - The infusion of a complex story only adds to the open-ended 2-D Metroid formula in the series' Game Boy Advance debut.

Metroid: Zero Missi[illegible]

February, 2004 - Advanced [illegible]phic style and an expanded adventure help tell Samus's full story on planet Zebes.

Metroid Prime 2: Echoes

November, 2004 - Dark and light blend and clash in the Prime sequel[illegible]d a multiplayer option is a series first.

November, 2004
With two screens and touch sensitivity, the Nintendo DS changes the gaming world.

Metroid Prime Pinball

October, 2005 - Samus Aran's Morph Ball form makes a Metroid pinball spin-off a natural new frontier for the DS.

Metroid Prime Hunters

March, 2006 - Hunters for the DS brings multiplayer gaming to the forefront for the first time in the series, and introduces a new group of bounty hunters.

November, 2006
The revolution begins with the introduction of the motion-control-triggered Wii console.

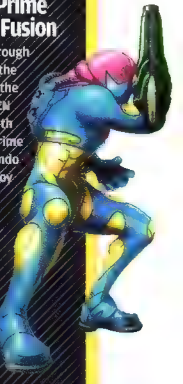
Metroid Prime 3: Corruption

August, 2007 - Twenty years into her mission to bring great gaming to the masses, Samus shows no signs of slowing down.

ORIGINAL BOUNTY

It's 1987 All Over Again

Even if you don't have the original NES system, you can play through the first adventure in all of its 8-bit glory in three different ways:



Via Metroid Prime and Metroid Fusion

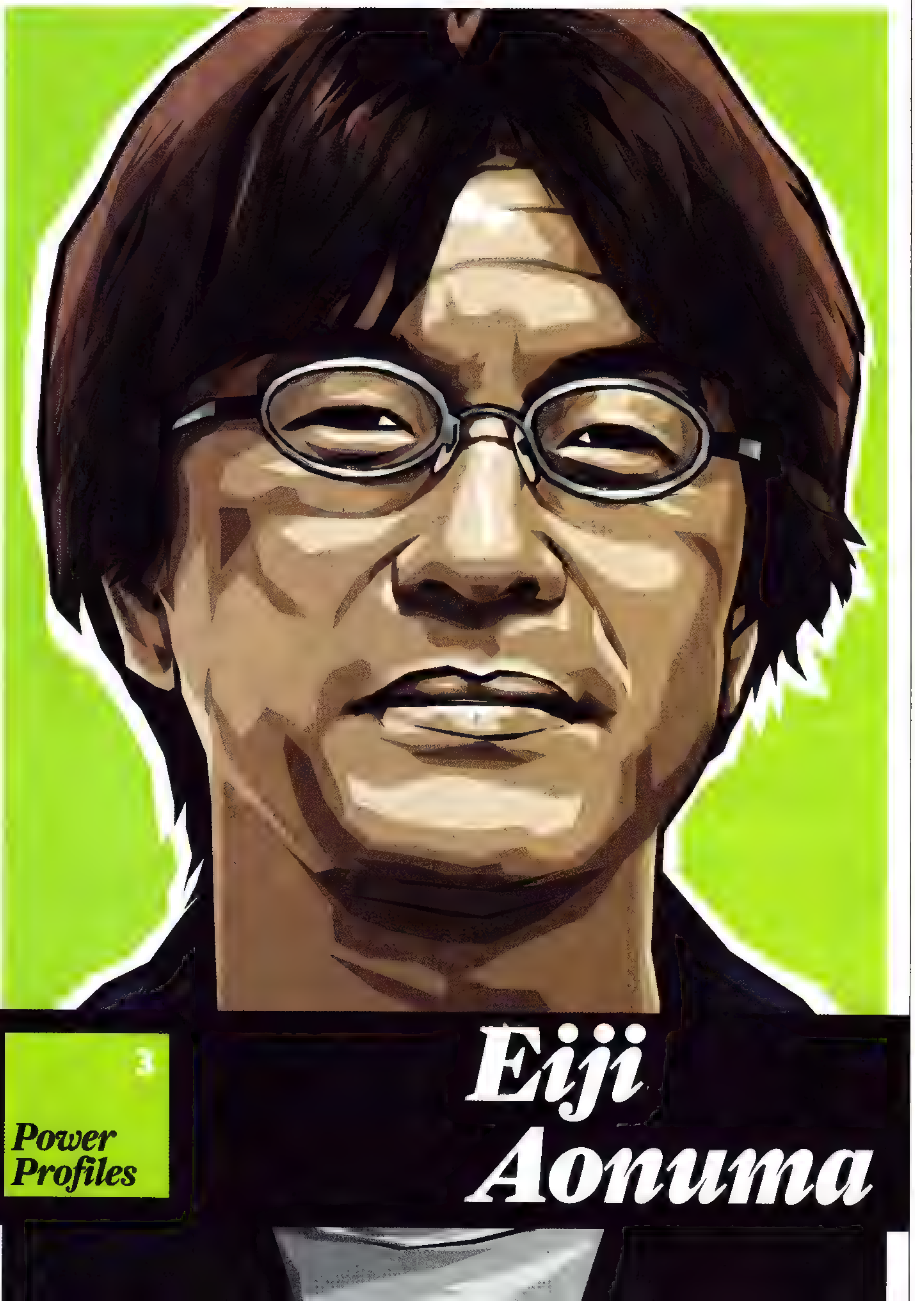
Play all the way through Metroid Fusion on the GBA, then connect the handheld with a GCN that is equipped with the first Metroid Prime title (using a Nintendo GameCube Game Boy Advance cable). You'll unlock the original adventure on the console.

Via Metroid: Zero Mission

Play through Metroid: Zero Mission (an expanded retelling of the first Metroid adventure) to unlock the original game as a menu choice.

Via Classic NES Series

The original Metroid appeared again on GBA in October 2004 as part of the second batch of Classic NES Series games.



3

Power Profiles

Eiji Aonuma

What would you do if you were to take over as the creative force behind one of the most beloved series in video game history? And if the position were originally held by Shigeru Miyamoto? For Nintendo director and producer Eiji Aonuma, it was all about forging his own path.

Though the humble Aonuma would likely disagree, if anyone was meant to fill Miyamoto's shoes, it's him. He's worked on nearly all the console Zelda games since Ocarina of Time, proving that he had the chops to take the reins. It's undoubtedly his experiences with those games that fueled his desire to take the series into new territory, whether it was with a revamped visual style, gameplay mechanics, or an entirely new control scheme. Although some of the changes haven't been universally welcomed by hard-core Zelda fans, there's no denying that each game—from Majora's Mask to Twilight Princess—has been met with great success and acclaim, further cementing Aonuma's place as one of the most talented designers in the industry.

DATE OF BIRTH:
1963

BIRTHPLACE:
Nagano Prefecture

[illegible]
Manager and producer of software development at Nintendo Co., Ltd.

BEST KNOWN FOR:
Taking the Zelda series in new directions with The Wind Waker and Twilight Princess

FAVORITE FOOD:
His wife's cooking

CURRENT PROJECTS:
The Legend of Zelda: The Phantom Hourglass

Nintendo Power: What do you think is the biggest challenge facing Nintendo right now in terms of expanding the audience but also keeping the core fan base happy?

Eiji Aonuma: It's because of gamers that games have come as far as they have. They have caused games to evolve over time, so it's not Nintendo's intent to alienate those people. There's going to be a point where if [Nintendo] kept going on the path that we were going—that it isn't going to be able to go any further. We needed to have a new approach to games and provide a different experience—that was our intent with creating the DS and Wii. It's also about the players' experience and less about how skillful they are. With that approach, we think we can involve everyone—people who played games in the past because the approach is so new, and people who were never gamers. There are so many possibilities and I'm looking forward to the future.

NP: Looking back on The Wind Waker and Twilight Princess, which visual style do you like better?

EA: They both have places in my heart because I put such hard work into each of them. Right now my son is playing Twilight Princess, but when he is done with that I will show him The Wind Waker. It's not that one is better than the other. I like them both because they're so different. Moving forward, I think it's all about variety. I think that variety in Zelda makes it the wonderful thing that it is. Personally, I want to make a Wind Waker for Wii—not that it will happen [laughs], but I would love to see it.

NP: You've talked a little bit about letting younger members of your team take over the design duties for the Zelda series. If that happens, are there other kinds of projects you'd like to work on or move on to?

EA: First, it's not that I want to get away from Zelda at all and leave it to the younger staff members, but I believe they'll bring something different to it—maybe it's a different skill set or maybe a different life experience than the older members of the group. We want to enrich the whole group by bringing in a new perspective. Like Miyamoto-san, I have no intention of retiring soon.

NP: Why do you think the Zelda franchise has had such a powerful impact on so many gamers over the past 20 years?

EA: Actually, while I was working so hard on Twilight Princess, my staff asked me what it was that made Zelda so alluring. What made staff

"Moving forward, I think it's all about variety. I think that variety in Zelda makes it the wonderful thing that it is. Personally, I want to make a Wind Waker for Wii—not that it will happen [laughs], but I would love to see it."

GAMEOGRAPHY

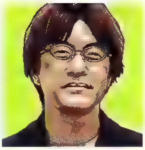
Aonuma's first game was only released in Japan, but it made such an impression on Miyamoto (probably due to the game's resemblance to the Zelda series) that he asked Aonuma to join the Zelda team as a director on The Ocarina of Time. Aonuma has been involved in just about every Zelda game since then, ranging from Majora's Mask to Four Swords Adventures.

MARVELOUS: MOUHITOTSU NO TAKARAJIMA
SUPER FAMICOM, 1996 (JAPAN)

マーヴェラス
〜もうひとつの宝島〜
©1996 Nintendo

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE OCARINA OF TIME
N64, 1998

members push themselves so hard and invest so much into it? Because of the kind of game Zelda is, it's able to incorporate all kinds of game experiences for the player. You have such a strong main character and this environment that create so many possibilities. As a result, players can lose themselves in the game and experience it as though they are Link.



"Because of the kind of game Zelda is, it's able to incorporate all kinds of game experiences for the player. You have such a strong main character and this environment that create so many possibilities. As a result, players can lose themselves in the game and experience it as though they are Link."

NP: When you were first asked to take the reins of the Zelda franchise, was it daunting?

EA: I think the reason I've been able to do my job as producer and director of Zelda for so long is because I'm not the type of person who worries about pressure. I'll feel the pressure, but what can you do but just get it done?

NP: What is your favorite part of the creative process?

EA: I guess my favorite part is when a great idea becomes reality and it is in fact a great idea. When I look at a game, I look at all the things that work and all the things that don't work and I try to eliminate them, leaving just the good stuff. There are still times when that not-so-good stuff is left in just because we can't get around it. But when Miyamoto-san and I look at a game, sometimes it's kind of rough when he upends the tea table, but it's also very fun.

NP: What do you think is the most important element of making a video game?

EA: My life would be so much easier if I knew the answer to that. [Laughs] It's hard work and the ability to continue to improve something—that determination. Once you've experienced or created something really good, it gives you the power to keep going when something isn't going well—that belief that it will happen and having that experience that you know you'll be able to make something good.

NP: How did you originally get into the video game business?

EA: I applied for Nintendo and got in and started making games for Nintendo. Actually, in college I did a lot of woodworking and would make functional wood sculptures. Miyamoto-san was actually very fond of that because he, too, likes to work with his hands and make things with wood, so maybe he saw an ally. [Laughs]

NP: Which games or game creators outside of Nintendo do you most respect or admire?

EA: It's not that I don't respect other game creators, but when I think of people I really admire or respect, I think of Hayao Miyazaki. He's someone who really is an artist and has changed the way people look at things. I definitely admire him. But at times like this, Miyamoto-san tells me to say that I really respect Miyamoto-san. [Laughs]

NP: When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

EA: I wanted to be a professor or a scientist who builds robots. I wanted to be like the guys who built Astro Boy or Dr. Tenma. I was a little crazy. Not that I wanted to be crazy, but I just wanted to build robots.

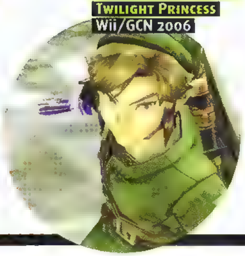
NP: What is your favorite nongaming hobby or pastime?

EA: I'm a percussionist. I play Latin drums.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK
N64, 2000

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER
GCN, 2003

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS
Wii/GCN 2006



IN A WORLD BOUND BY PROPHECY
A HERO OF LEGEND ASCENDS
TO SEVER THE CHAINS OF FATE!
HOSHIGAMI
RUINING BLUE EARTH
REMIX
Lv02
08 Step
Attack
Item
CF
Status
-End-
Session
Defend

You can move to the selected area in blue. RAP Gauge is depleted the farther you move.

EXPERIENCE THE WORLD OF HOSHIGAMI LIKE NEVER BEFORE!
Featuring a brand new character, missions, music, character art, introductory animation as well as a new localization!

IMMERSE YOURSELF IN BATTLE WITH AN ENHANCED USER INTERFACE!
Issue strategic commands quickly and efficiently with a revised, streamlined interface and optional stylus control!

OVER 50 HOURS OF INTENSE TACTICAL GAMEPLAY!
Branching paths and multiple endings! Are you skilled enough to get the one and only true ending?

TEEN
T
Mild Fantasy Violence
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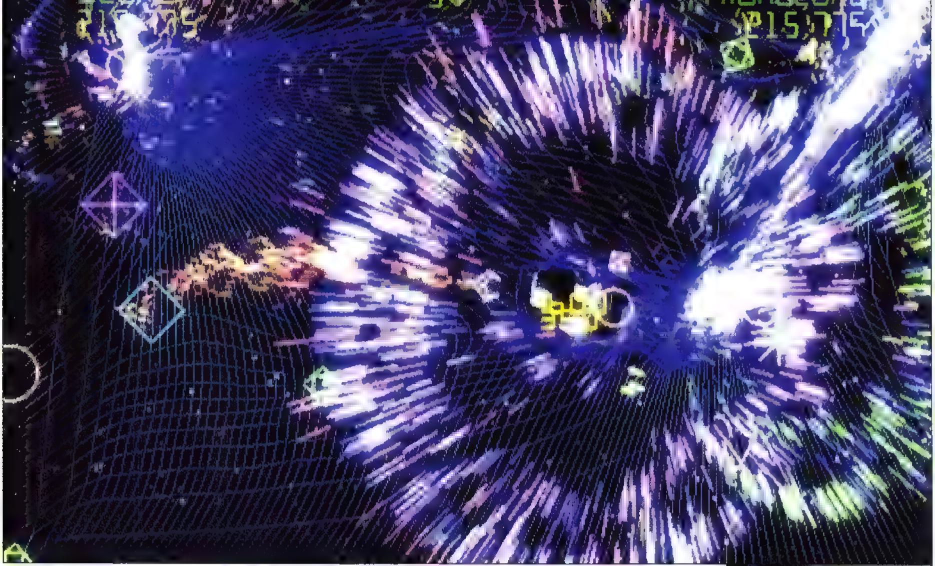


A New Angle

Geometry Wars: Galaxies will dominate the abstract plane this year with nearly congruent versions of the game on Wii and DS.

By Drew Williams

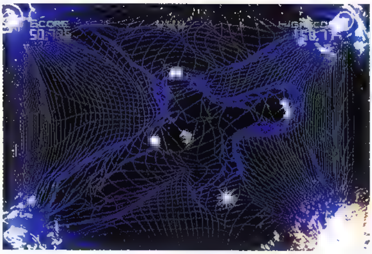
Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved, the crown jewel of Xbox Live Arcade's launch lineup, was probably the last game anyone thought would show up on a Nintendo system, but now Sierra is ready to bring the frenetic shooter to two consoles simultaneously this fall. We've got the details on expanded gameplay in both the Wii and DS versions of Geometry Wars: Galaxies, plus series creator Stephen Cakebread of Bizarre Creations connects the dots between the game's surprising past and its bright future.

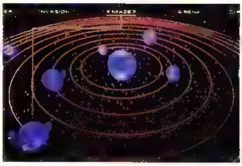
Enter the Wii Dimension . . .

Geometry Wars began life as lowly test code. Bizarre Creations senior coder Stephen Cakebread just wanted to write a quick-and-dirty program for running an Xbox controller through its paces, but he ultimately ended up with a cultural phenomenon. During the development of Project Gotham Racing 1 and its sequel, the little test game grew and grew until Bizarre Creations decided to insert it into Project Gotham Racing 2 as an Easter egg.

"Much to our surprise, the Easter egg turned out to be quite popular," Cakebread remembers, "so when we had a chance to do a Live Arcade title for the Xbox 360 launch, it seemed the obvious choice to do Geometry Wars."

The simple 2-D shooter—reminiscent of Williams Electronics's classic Robotron: 2084 but about a zillion times faster and





You can access worlds and moons—AKA levels—on 3-D maps in Galaxies.

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prettier—developed legions of fans who posted their scores on fan sites and even recorded their old-school virtuosity so they could post it on YouTube. The game had clearly arrived as a retro-ish alternative to the increasingly complex titles available on the 360, but where was it *going*? As we found out back in May, its next stop will be Wii.

Geometry Wars: Galaxies on Wii offers the basic Retro Evolved game—albeit with configurable, motion-sensitive controls that dramatically alter the experience—and a new 50-level Galaxies game that introduces several new enemies (see "Bad Shapes," at right), collectable "Geoms" that are used to unlock game content, and a cool, customizable drone ship that fights by your side.

"The drone will develop its range of abilities over the course of the game," explains Bizarre Creations design manager Craig Howard. "This will allow the player to learn new strategies as the game progresses, giving them the choice to deploy a wide repertoire of multipronged assaults when going to battle." The drone's abilities include upgradeable weapons, like missiles and shields, and three types of AI behavior.

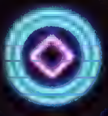
There's also an option to have a second human player fighting by your side, thanks to a new multiplayer component. You may need the help as you tackle the varied Galaxies environments. Associate producer Tim Tran of Sierra says that the development team is still generating ideas for the individual levels, including geometric twists on classic games like Tempest and Defender. More specifics about the game should materialize as Galaxies nears its fall release date, but Sierra promises that the new content should add up to eight hours of fresh gameplay.

ENEMIES MINE

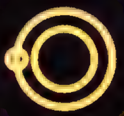
Bad Shapes

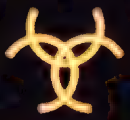
In addition to the malevolent shapes that already populate the grid in Retro Evolved, Galaxies adds a new generation of abstract aggressors. Each has unique characteristics that will force you to change the way you play the game.

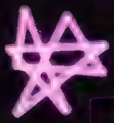
Generators trudge across the battle map, spawning waves upon waves of random enemies as they go.

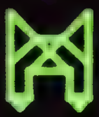


These gravitational fields pull players' ships and enemies into their orbits.







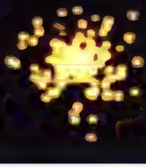


Mutated enemies—created by Mutators—are small, lightning-fast, and extremely aggressive.

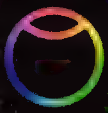
Mutators transform any enemy they touch into fast, deadly foes. (See Mutated.)

These enemies aggressively pursue your ship and make other enemies scatter.

Parasites latch onto ships then hinder their abilities. You'll need to shake the remote to lose them.

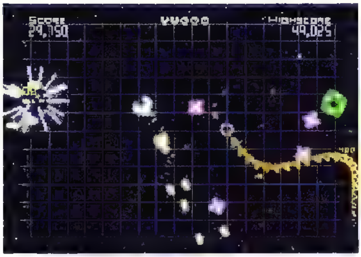


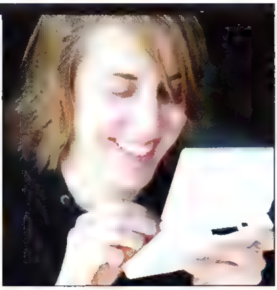
Like the UFOs in the game Asteroids, these point-rich ships zip across the screen at random during battles.

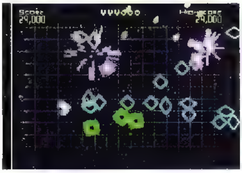


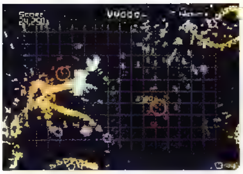
...Or a Parallel World on DS

If you own the Wii version of Galaxies, you'll be able to download Retro Evolved to your DS anytime you like, but if you own the game for both systems, an even more intriguing symbiosis occurs. Despite some technical limitations due to its size—mainly in the area of graphics the DS version of Galaxies will offer more or less the same game as its big brother. More importantly, you can swap save data between the two systems—so you can jump back and forth between the Wii and DS while maintaining the continuity of a single game. After some hands-on time with Retro Evolved on both systems, we were surprised just how remarkably similar the experience was—using the the stylus to fire on the touch screen more or less approximates the default control scheme—aiming a reticle with the remote—on the Wii. So whether you're at home or on the bus, you'll be tearing up 2-D space come autumn.









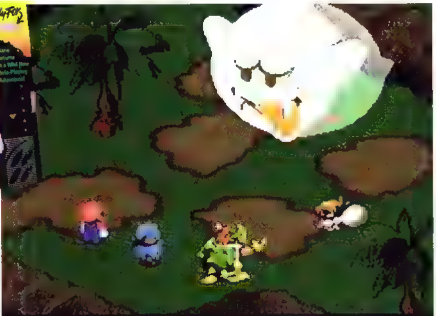
Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved is just as frantic and fun on the DS's small screen as it is on the Wii. Using the stylus to shoot allows for lightning-fast reactions.

SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS

Mario makes his mark on the RPG series with help from the RPG masters.

SUPER NINTENDO

PLATFORM: SNES
DEVELOPER: SQUARE
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
RELEASE DATE: MAY 1996
COVERED IN ISSUES: 77, 79, 82, 83, 84, 86, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 110, 116
NOTES IN A TADPOLE TUNE: 8



It took years of therapy for Bowser to get past the trauma of fighting side by side with his sworn nemesis Mario.

Before Super Mario RPG hit the scene, Mario already had a bajillion titles under his tool belt, and the vast majority of these games were either bread-and-butter platformers or sports games (with the occasional typing tutor thrown in for good measure). But in 1996, Square shook up the famous plumber's legacy with a turn-based RPG, and Mario's renaissance-man reputation was set in stone.

Mario's first venture into the RPG world was a bit on the light side for a lot of hard-core gamers used to Square's typical FINAL FANTASY offerings. Exploration of the linear, isometric levels was simple, and the battles weren't all that complex. However, the combat system introduced battle actions to boost the effects of attacks, as well as Flower Points to limit how many special attacks you could perform—features that remain in today's Mario RPGs. There were plenty of action oriented challenges as well, in the form of arcade-ish minigames to rack up coins and items. The hybrid-style gameplay made a lot of sense for its time—Mario has always been a man of the people, and the painless fighting system made Super Mario RPG easy enough for fans of the big man's platformers to enjoy.

With such a large body of work to draw from over Mario's illustrious career, it's surprising how many original characters and locations were devised for Super Mario RPG. In addition to the expected cast of Bowser, Yoshi, and Princess Peach, new folks such as Geno (a possessed, talking doll) and Frogfucius (an old, amphibian philosopher) make their debuts. But like these two central figures, a lot of characters never again had more than a cameo appearance in a Mario game—in typical Square fashion, the humongous cast featured plenty of forgettable side characters.

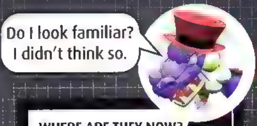
Super Mario RPG broke a few cardinal rules regarding Mario's adventures. For one, Bowser wasn't the main enemy; he kept his evil streak, of course, but he eventually saw the benefit helping Mario fight a mutual (worse) enemy. Also, Mario's adventures found him well outside the friendly confines of the Mushroom Kingdom; new areas such as Tadpole Pond and Booster Tower gave Mario the opportunity to encounter new people and monsters without stomping on the traditions of the Mario platformers.

Perhaps the most indelible stamp Square put on Super Mario RPG was the inclusion of a secret boss—Culex, a creature with a FINAL FANTASY twist. He never actually appeared in a FINAL FANTASY game, but he has the classic look from Square's SNES glory days, and his battle music is borrowed from FINAL FANTASY IV.

As the legacy of Super Mario RPG continues in games like Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga and Super Paper Mario, it's good to know where it all began.
—CHRIS S.

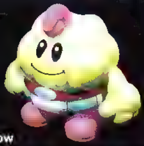
Yoshi was eventually cleared of all doping charges.

Have a favorite classic game you'd like to see revisited?
Send us your requests—we'll consider them for a future installment of Playback.
pulse@nintendopower.com


Do I look familiar?
I didn't think so.

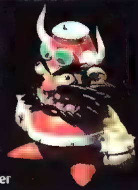
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

The legacy of Super Mario RPG continues through the current Mario RPG-style titles, but the game's characters weren't so lucky. We catch up with some of the one-time heroes of Super Mario RPG.



Mallow

After reclaiming his rightful throne in Nimbus Land, depression sunk in when Mallow realized he was the monarch of a freaking cloud.



Booster

Mario taking Princess Toadstool away from Booster turned out to be a blessing. All she did was talk about Mario's 'stache and she never said a word about Booster's sweet facial hair.

Mario

After recovering the seven stars and repairing Star Road, Mario was able to retire to relative anonymity, never to appear in a game ever again.

REVIEWS

In-depth reviews of all the latest games.

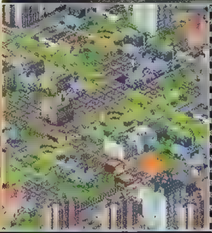
Resident Evil 4 makes its Wii debut, but is it worth a second go? Find out in our review.

84
Tony Montana reigns in the Wii version of Scarface.

SEADRA used
BubbleBeam!

+ Pokémon Battle Revolution, Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer, and more.

86
Brothers in Arms is both shocking and awe-ing!



88
Finally, a Sim game where you don't have to worry about using the toilet.

Ashley
Leon

RIGHT ON TARGET

RESIDENT EVIL 4: Wii EDITION

RATING: 9.0
PLATFORM: Wii
PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
DEVELOPER: CAPCOM
ESRB: MATURE

Few games are so finely crafted as the original GameCube version of Resident Evil 4. Even fewer have the distinction of being ported to other platforms and surpassing the original in nearly every respect—most notably (and obviously) the controls.

Of course, the controls in the original Resident Evil 4 were an advance over previous entries in the series to begin with. The change in camera perspective and level design worked wonders for RE's clunky tanklike controls, making it easier to not only see immediate danger but also to evade threats since cramped, claustrophobic rooms were no longer an issue. Indeed, the only real argument one could make against RE4's controls is that you can't run and shoot at the same time, but Resident Evil has never been about run-and-gun action. The gameplay revolves around the idea that you have your back up against a wall, figuratively and literally, while enormous swarms of enemies (albeit mostly slow-moving ones) come at you. The inability to run and shoot aids the all-important feeling of terror.

And Resident Evil 4 conveys that feeling better than any other game in the series, and perhaps any game in the genre. Few things surpass the moment you hear the revving of a chainsaw and its owner lurching up the stairs while you hastily decide whether jumping out a window down to a crowd of bloodthirsty villagers is a better alternative than facing off against a chainsaw-wielding maniac. Or the feeling of walking through an abandoned prison, listening closely for even the slightest signs of your invisible stalkers. Other white-knuckle moments, such as when you're confronted with an apparently impervious foe while you wait for an elevator to power up, are numerous.

If you didn't play the GCN version, you're in for quite a ride. But the question is, is the Wii version worth a second time through the game? The fact that it's priced at only $29.99 is enough to make it a no-brainer for real fans. But price aside, the answer is an unequivocal yes—thanks to the Wii's control scheme, you'll want to mow down Las Plagas all over again.

The combination of the nunchuk and Wii remote doesn't fundamentally change what RE4 is about or how it plays, however. You aim using the remote, use the analog stick to move your character and manipulate the camera while aiming, press the trigger to draw your weapon, and fire by pressing the A Button. You can also swing your knife by flicking the Wii remote. It's straightforward and takes almost no time to get used to. (But you do have to remember that the remote doesn't move the camera while you're in firing position—that's easy to forget when your adrenaline is pumping, and it's my only real qualm with the new control setup.) The most tangible change that Wii control brings is added precision afforded by the remote and a very visible reticle that can make just about anyone a crack shot. The greater accuracy drives you to rely on your pistol more than ever before, not just because it's easier to make leg and head shots (and thus easier to evade enemies), but because you can take out dozens of foes from a decent range. It's almost like having a second—but weaker—sniper rifle, which gives the game a much greater strategic feel. Moreover, the added precision saves precious ammunition for when enemies start coming out of the woodwork.

Newcomers will find the Wii controls welcoming and less intimidating than the controls in previous RE games. But the overall experience may feel easier for those who already know what creatures lurk in the shadows. Fear not, though, RE veterans: the Wii edition has extra content that was originally exclusive to the PlayStation 2 version of RE4. Most notable are the five extra levels featuring Ada Wong, a mysterious agent whose motives are continually in question. Her levels are quite brief compared to those in the rest of the game and they don't look nearly as polished, but seeing cool moments in RE4 from a different perspective make Ada's missions completely worthwhile. Learning more about Ada's ties to Albert Wesker and his involvement in the plot doesn't hurt either. To top it off, playing through Ada's missions opens up new costumes for the game's main characters.

The extras make Wii Edition tantamount to a super-duper director's cut version of a blockbuster movie; you won't find a better version of RE4 anywhere else. In fact, you'd be hard-pressed to find a better game—period.

—GIANCARLO V.

Leon takes dead aim at the RE4's evil forces.

WRITERS' BLOCK

[illegible]

Soulcalibur Legends got us talking about other games that needed a swift kick in the pants, and thus, hilarity ensued.

CHRIS HOFFMAN

If Soulcalibur can become an action game, why not Street Fighter? Make it multiplayer and 2-D. A Street Fighter RPG could be fantastic, too.

CHRIS SHEPPERD

Two words: Manhunt Golf.

ANDY MYERS

I propose a Wii fantasy RPG inspired by Cooking Mama, in which you must mix spells then perform the proper incantations.

GEORGE SINFIELD

Imagine an RTS called Mega Men. Capcom's creation is a robot, right? Think about an army of blue bombers taking on Dr. Wily's forces.

STEVE THOMASON

I have a brilliant idea! Why doesn't Sega make a Shining Force game that's actually a turn-based strategy-RPG? Remember those?

SCOTT PELLAND

Surgeons, chefs, and lawyers have been in the gaming spotlight recently. How about Mario running an actual plumbing business in Brooklyn?

DREW WILLIAMS

How about a Namco Museum stealth game? You break into the museum to find the guy who keeps re-releasing the same game.

GIANCARLO VARANINI

I want a full-motion video murder mystery adventure starring John Madden. He solves crimes using a giant bucket of chicken.

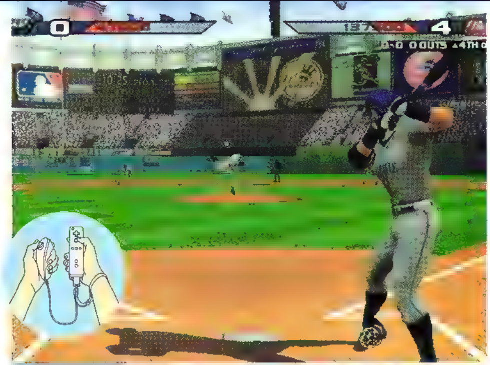
FANTASTIC FOUR: RISE OF THE SILVER SURFER DS

FANTASTIC FOUR: RISE OF THE SILVER SURFER

RATING: 2.0

PLATFORM: NINTENDO DS
PUBLISHER: 2KGAMES
DEVELOPER: SEVEN STUDIOS
ESRB: EVERYONE 10+

Let's just get this out of the way: there's nothing *fantastic* about this game. See what I did there? Unfortunately, even using idiotic puns is being a little too generous with Mr. Fantastic and family's new adventure on the DS. That probably won't come as a shock considering the rich history of terrible movie-license titles, but this one is extraspecial. The game is broken down so that each member of the Fantastic Four has a dedicated sublevel within the main level. Each sublevel tries—quite unsuccessfully—to emphasize the characters' individual superpowers, but it boils down to characters punching a lot (one character punching by shooting psychic beams, and another shooting fireballs in top-down shooter levels). When you're not punching, you're hitting switches to make platforms move up and down or side to side, which leads to some awesomely bad platforming thanks to the game's sluggish controls and spotty collision detection. It's basically like playing through one level over and over again. The same goes for the bosses. Even though you're fighting everything from a giant robot-tank-prison thing to Dr. Doom, all of the bosses essentially shoot the same projectiles and have the same attacks. Accordingly, you fight them all the same way: by using the stylus to tap or make sweeping motions across the bottom screen like there's no tomorrow. If you need a comic-book, movie-license game fix, look elsewhere. I beg you. —GIANCARLO V.



SWING AND A MISS

THE BIGS

RATING: 6.0

PLATFORM: Wii
PUBLISHER. 2K SPORTS
DEVELOPER: BLUE CASTLE GAMES
ESRB: EVERYONE

As the only major baseball game coming to the Wii this summer, a lot of people have been wondering whether 2K Sports would step up to the plate with its over-the-top hardball title The Bigs. Unfortunately, the first big foray into baseball sims on the Wii strikes out in many ways.

Virtually everything you would expect to do in a baseball game—hit, pitch, throw, field—is done via Wii-remote movement. For some of the actions the motion controls are spot-on: You pitch as you would in real life, and alter what kind of pitch you'll deliver by rotating your wrist. Batting is similarly intuitive, although it's uncomfortable in the long run to take full hacks at pitches; you'll find it more comfortable to swing with short movements instead. Once you get into the field, things start to get a little dicey. You're supposed to be able to throw the ball to a base by holding down the A Button and flicking your wrist toward the proper bag; but the time it takes to throw is way too long, and the ball seldom goes to the intended base. You can use the Control Pad to direct your throws, but that kind of sucks the fun out of the Wii remote. The same goes for big-play fielding—you should be able to dive for a ball with Wii-remote gestures, but you end up jumping when you wanted to dive, and vice versa.

The primary single-player activity is Rookie Challenge mode, where you create a young player and nurture him through a season. The Bigs' "season" is a collection of games and challenges that usually involves performing some feat. Sometimes you get stuck playing the same game over and over again until, say, your player gets three RBIs. But worse, the single-player events are horribly unbalanced in favor of the CPU-controlled team. Even on the easiest difficulty, if you make the most modest pitching mistake, it's likely to fall for a double into the gap. The CPU team makes bonus-earning big plays pretty much every inning, while you're lucky to pull off one per game. The only way to have a fair game is to grab a friend and play multiplayer hardball.

Finally, the portrayal of the MLB players is absurd; about a third of the athletes look nothing like their real-world selves. This is one of the terrible consequences of MLB's exclusive deal with 2K Sports. Without competition to inspire quality, the publisher can take the easy route all the way to the bank. —CHRIS S.

HAVE A BALL, TONY

SCARFACE: THE WORLD IS YOURS

RATING: 7.5

PLATFORM: Wii
PUBLISHER: SIERRA ENTERTAINMENT
DEVELOPER: RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT
ESRB: MATURE

There are a couple of elephants in the room when you start talking about the Wii version of Scarface: The World Is Yours. First, you need to consider the timing of its release. Other versions of the game were available for last-gen consoles back in October—so the content isn't exactly fresh, and the hype surrounding the title has all but evaporated. Next, it's fair to say there are some (exact) similarities between this game and various Grand Theft Auto iterations. If you wanted to brand The World is Yours as a derivative port trying to cash in on the success of both the Wii and the GTA series, you'd have a lot of ammunition at your disposal. If you accept the game on its own terms, however, you'll wring plenty of fun out of Tony Montana's profane world.

Aside from being yours, the game's world is huge and reasonably attractive, mainly due to lighting effects. As in the GTA games, you roam a city, carjack motorists for disposable transportation, and perform missions to advance your status in the game. Basically, you do everything you did in GTA: Vice City, except that now you're doing it as a fallen Cuban drug kingpin with a potty mouth. The game begins where the movie ends, with an M16-wielding Tony fighting off hordes of enforcers from a rival gang. But instead of being ventilated by approximately 1,000 bullets, Tony escapes to rebuild his drug empire through the barrel of a gun.

Using the Wii remote for camera control and targeting while on foot makes for surprisingly fun and frustration-free thuggery. If you shake the nunchuk while you shoot people, you'll taunt them and fill your "balls" meter. A maxed-out meter fills Tony with homicidal rage, magically makes his bullets more effective, and replenishes health. It's at these absurd, ultraviolent moments that Scarface ingratiates itself to the GTA-savvy gamer. Go ahead and fill up Sierra Entertainment's balls meter—they've earned it. —DREW W.

A cock-a-roach sighting killed the business at this club.

Percy is - the world's - BIGGEST - git!"

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX DS

LEGEND OF THE DRAGON Wii

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

RATING: 7.0

PLATFORM: NINTENDO DS
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: EA UK
ESRB: EVERYONE 10 +

Even a confirmed muggle can cast spells and battle Death Eaters in the Nintendo DS version of Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix. Closely following the events of the best-selling book and this summer's film, the DS Phoenix places you in Harry's shoes during his most disruptive year yet at Hogwarts. With Professor Umbridge taking control of the school and most of the wizarding world turning a blind eye to Harry's reported clash with Voldemort, Harry secretly prepares an army of students to face You Know Who. But when you're not following the tightly scripted storyline—a ghostly hand always points the direction to your next objective—you'll have a chance for some fun. The game shines brightest when you get to use magic or play minigames between plot-driven tasks. Whether you're mixing potions in Snape's classroom or shooting Gobstones with fellow students, the stylus-driven actions almost feel like brandishing your own magic wand. Spellcasting most often includes drawing and tapping magical symbols on the touch screen. Unfortunately, the turn-based battles present limited challenge, and duels tend to become repetitious exercises requiring little actual strategy. Navigating the school's endless passages and grounds also wears thin after a short time. You'll spend the majority of the game running from one task location to the next. As a Harry Potter fan, I would welcome the chance to roam Hogwarts freely, but when the game prevents you from exploring open doors with Hermione's pointed reminder ("I don't think this is the right way, Harry!") you know you're not in control. Order of the Phoenix delivers nice graphics and music, and some genuinely fun activities (including a multiplayer mode) but the endless tasks seem more like prepping for O.W.L.S. than playing a game. —SCOTT P.

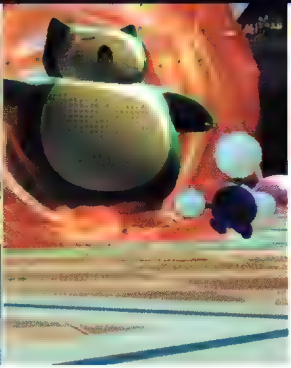
LEGEND OF THE DRAGON

RATING: 5.5

PLATFORM: Wii
PUBLISHER: THE GAME FACTORY
DEVELOPER: NEKO ENTERTAINMENT
ESRB: TEEN

Just as the Legend of the Dragon TV series comes off as a faint echo of *Dragon Ball Z*, The Game Factory's Wii adaptation serves as a reminder that it takes more than two battlers and an arena to make a memorable fighting game. The title gives us serviceable gameplay, cartoon-worthy graphics, and seven variations on one-on-one fighting (including three very similar two-player modes), but there's little to make it rise above the fighting-game fray. The 18 playable characters are capable of transforming into magic-empowered guardians, each of which can execute three motion-controlled attacks, but the controls, moves, and powers of the characters are identical. Similarly, there are 18 arenas (all locations from the show) but one open battleground is as good as the next. The Wii-control specifics (remote and nunchuk swipes) give the game a slight twist on the basic battler. They're just not enough to give it distinction. —GEORGE S.

A critical hit!



THE REVOLUTION WILL BE TELEVISED

POKéMON BATTLE REVOLUTION

RATING: 6.5

PLATFORM: Wii
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER GENIUS SONORITY
ESRB: EVERYONE

As Pokémon Diamond and Pokémon Pearl continue to completely rock the DS, Nintendo is following up with a hearty supplement on the Wii for all the new Trainers. Pokémon Battle Revolution has its ups and downs, but it makes for a decent way to get more out of Diamond and Pearl.

The most tantalizing feature of Pokémon Battle Revolution is the opportunity to see your Pokémon in 3-D, and in that regard the game seldom disappoints. From the ornate backgrounds to the detailed Pokémon to the stunning attack graphics, Battle Revolution is the eye candy that every Pokémon fan expects it to be. The only letdown is the occasional use of a soft filter to provide the illusion of depth of field—it does little more than muddy the imagery. Overall, however, the graphics are some of the best we've seen on the Wii so far.

Pokémon Battle Revolution's Colosseum mode is where you'll spend most of your single-player hours—it's where you kill time between multiplayer skirmishes. Colosseum mode isn't all that flashy—you can participate in challenges that feature an assortment of rules to test your Trainer skills, but there's little variety in the battling itself. The CPU Trainers start out pretty easy, then get progressively cunning (and parade tougher Pokémon onto the battlefield) as you advance through the ranks. To extend the single-player experience, the Trainers feature new, randomly selected Pokémon on the subsequent times you play through the challenges. You earn prizes in the form of Poké Coupons that you can use to deck out your Trainer in new gear, but that's the extent of your reward.

Desiree
We are Leaders-in-Training.

If you can beat me, I'll let you keep my awesome beret.

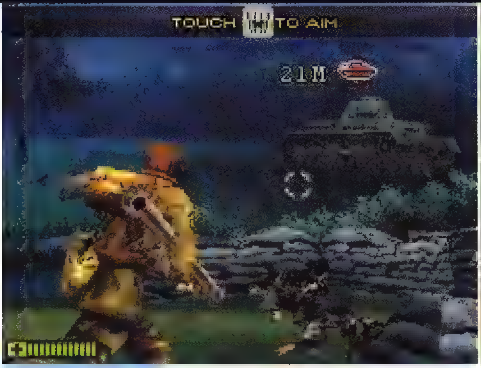
Any Trainer worth his salt knows that Pokémon glory comes from battling other human Trainers, and Pokémon Battle Revolution has both local and Wi-Fi modes for you to challenge your friends. As the first Wii title to utilize Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection, Pokémon Battle Revolution works smoothly enough. If you want to battle against a random stranger, you simply set the parameters for the kind of engagement you're looking for—Double Battle, level limits, etc.—and you'll be matched up with an opponent. At the end of the melee, you can choose to add your foe to your friends list for a quick rematch later on. In a few months, when more and more games are showing off more intricate capabilities, we might look back and say that there really wasn't much to the Wi-Fi element here, but everything has to start somewhere.

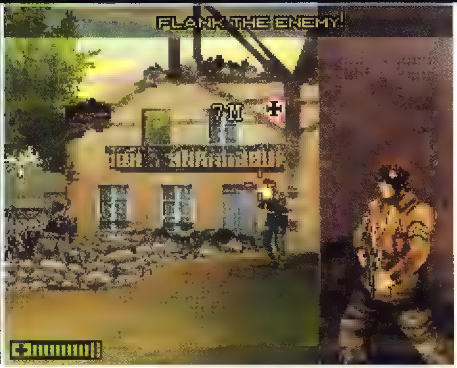
Pokémon Battle Revolution shows off some of the Wii's additional intriguing technical capabilities. In previous console Pokémon games, it was tricky to get your party over to your friend's house for some marathon battling. Now you can simply copy your top team to your Wii remote and take it down the block. The ability to transfer Pokémon from your Pokémon Diamond or Pearl game isn't a new one, but the auto-updating feature when you reconnect your DS to your Wii is smart and makes things easy. Pokémon Battle Revolution is the first game that allows you to use the DS as a controller; however, except for hard-core battlers who are paranoid about their opponents seeing what moves their Pokémon have, there isn't much use for the functionality.

The innovations might be intriguing, but for Pokémon fans who have been playing since the Stadium days, Pokémon Battle Revolution's side activities will be a pretty big letdown. Basically, there aren't any—the chance to dress up your Trainer, go online, and buy items for your Pokémon is fine, but it's a far cry from even the lightweight minigames prominent in the N64 titles, let alone the side missions and activities in the extensive RPG-style GameCube titles. It's a shame, because the Wii provides the perfect opportunity to implement fun features—imagine snagging pieces of nigiri with the Wii remote in an updated version of Pokémon Stadium's Sushi-Go-Round minigame, for example.

In essence, Pokémon Battle Revolution serves to augment your experience with Diamond and Pearl—it performs its function aptly, but without the bells and whistles that Pokémon Colosseum and Pokémon XD provided.

—CHRIS S.





THE GREATEST TOUCH GENERATION

BROTHERS IN ARMS DS

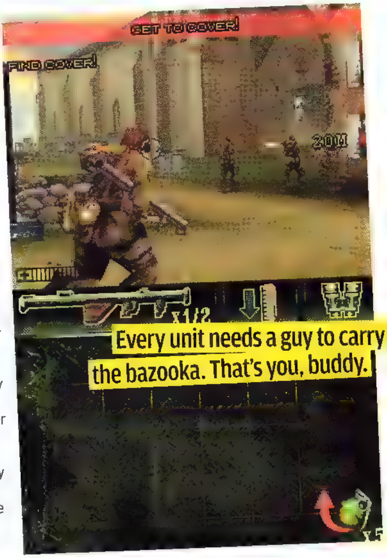
RATING: 9.0

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS**
PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **GEARBOX**
ESRB: **TEEN**

When a successful first-person shooter franchise makes the jump to a portable system, there's usually a collective eye roll among fans. There's no telling what will be foisted upon us—side-scroller, top-down shooter, card-based RPG, whatever—but it will almost certainly be lame. I was prepared to hate Brothers in Arms DS. But then it pulled the pin on its pineapple and blew me away. This third-person shooter uses a tight touch-screen interface and phenomenal graphics to deliver one of the best WWII-themed action games I've played on *any* console. BIA's Metroid Prime Hunters-style control scheme is implemented perfectly—it almost feels like a miniature version of Resident Evil 4 (except that you fight machine-gun-carrying Nazis instead of cranky, ax-wielding Spaniards). If not for a few minor AI, collision, and camera issues, this game might have been a contender for the first perfect-10 rating in Nintendo Power history.

Set during three major battles involving American troops—the D-Day invasion, the capture of Tunis, and the snowy Battle of the Bulge—BIA breaks its missions into easily digestible segments and gives you multiple save points, so you can pick up the game more or less where you left off when when the bus reached your stop. This understanding of the nature of portable gaming is usually absent in DS games of BIA's depth. If you play the game for 15 minutes every day, your experience will be about the same as someone who crashes through the single-player game in one seven- or eight-hour chunk. Although the missions are quite linear—the game actually guides you to check points—there are many opportunities for improvisation. While on foot, you can switch weapons on the fly—typically a Thompson submachine gun, a sniper rifle, and/or a bazooka—and toss grenades with deadly accuracy. As long as you keep some ammo in the can for mission-critical events, you can use any weapon you have equipped whenever you like. (One criticism of the level design: you often can't leapfrog objectives even if the opportunity is seemingly there. If you try to be too proactive, the world will go on as if you aren't even there.) There's also some tactical wiggle room; you can advance using cover or throw caution to the wind and run and gun, but I can't really endorse the latter method. Like its big siblings on other consoles, BIA DS keeps one foot in reality: if you take just a small bit of damage, the game yanks your dog tags and makes you start over at the last checkpoint. Excessive caution is also punished, however—especially in the tank missions. BIA demands that you simply do your job on the battlefield. In the end, that's more than enough to entertain you until you finish the Battle of the Bulge and delve into the game's multiplayer experience.

As good as the single-player battles are, BIA ends up winning the war by delivering an intense multiplayer experience for up to four people. It's very easy to simply camp and snipe in the cover-intensive arenas, but that fact only helps to generate suspense and intensity that so many multiplayer DS experiences lack. Despite the various antiwar quotations that the game uses to introduce missions, Brothers in Arms gives you plenty of good reasons to keep fighting. —**DREW W.**



Every unit needs a guy to carry the bazooka. That's you, buddy.

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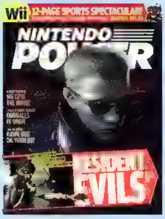
Wii
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RESIDENT EVILS

JULY 2007, VOLUME 217
Evil to the Core (Resident Evil: Umbrella Chronicles, Resident Evil 4: Wii Edition), Wii Brought the Party (Mario Party 8), Wii Sports Preview (Madden NFL 08, Mario Strikers Charged, The Bigs, Legends of the Indy 500, FIFA Soccer 08), Treasure Trove (Project Treasure Island Z), Heavy Metal (Transformers), Pokémon Triple Feature (Pokémon Battle Revolution, Pokémon Diamond and Pearl, A Trainer's History), Space Oddity (Space Station Tycoon), Power Profile Interview (Koji Kondo), No Strings Attached (Jam Sessions), Hungry for Heroes (Goichi Suda interview), Dewy's Adventure, Mega Man Star Force, Looney Tunes: ACME Arsenal, Dynasty Warriors DS: Fighter's Battle, Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix, Hoshigami Remix: Ruining Blue Earth, Fullmetal Alchemist Trading Card Game, Scarface: The World is Yours, Counter Force.

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WIN WITH Wii
NINTENDO POWER
POKÉMON

MAY 2007, VOLUME 215
Smash Files (Super Smash Bros. Brawl, Samus Aran: Power Suit), Pearls of Wisdom (Pokémon Diamond and Pokémon Pearl), Untamed, Unmatched, Unbreakable, Unbelievable, Unescapable, Unleashed (Godzilla Unleashed), War Stories (Brothers in Arms: Double Time), Dew Process (Dewy's Adventure), 2006 Nintendo Power Awards Winners, Build a Better Robot (Custom Robo Arena), Now You're Cooking With Power (Cooking Games), Super Paper Mario: The Interview, Comeback Kid (Kid Icarus), A Legend in its Own Time (The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time), Naruto: Ninja Council, Death, Jr. and the Science Fair of Doom, Medal of Honor: Vanguard, Time Ace, Touch the Dead, Spider-Man 3, Diner Dash, Code Lyoko.

Wii PREVIEWS
NINTENDO POWER
SEVEN

APRIL 2007, VOLUME 214
Smash Files (Super Smash Bros. Brawl, Fox McCloud), You Are Here (MySims), You & Mii, A Matter of Perspective (Super Paper Mario), Alien Invasion (Alien Syndrome), Fun for the Whole Family (The Godfather: Blackhand Edition), Clash of the Cards (SNK vs. Capcom Cardfighter), Ring Master (Sonic and the Secret Rings), Creature Features (Pokémon Diamond and Pokémon Pearl), Pop-Up Fowl (FINAL FANTASY Fables: Chocobo Tales), Heroes of Mana, Cooking Mama: Cook Off, Mortal Kombat: Armageddon, TMNT, Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07, Escape from Bug Island, Mercury Meltdown Revolution.

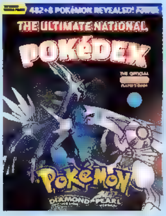
ON THE Wii
NINTENDO POWER
SONIC

MARCH 2007, VOLUME 213
Smash Files (Super Smash Bros. Brawl, Link), New Blue (Sonic and the Secret Rings), Better Gaming Through Science (We Create a Gamer), Grease Monkey (Diddy Kong Racing DS), Chairman of the Board (Mario Party 8), Lootin' & Tootin' (Wario: Master of Disguise), Motion Blur (SSX Blur), Sixth Sense (FINAL FANTASY VI ADVANCE), Nintendo Power Awards Nominations 2006, Super Paper Mario, TMNT, Rayman Raving Rabbids, Cake Mania, Pokémon Diamond & Pokémon Pearl, SNK vs. Capcom Card Fighters DS, Wii Play, Marvel Trading Card Game, Hotel Dusk: Room 215, Izuna: Legend of the Unemployed Ninja, Inuyasha: Secret of the Divine Jewel, Lunar Knights.

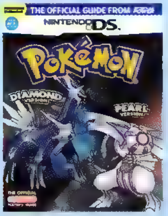
OFFICIAL NINTENDO PLAYER'S GUIDES

THE OFFICIAL GUIDE FROM NINTENDO POWER
Wii
Pokémon Battle Revolution

POKéMON BATTLE REVOLUTION


THE ULTIMATE NATIONAL POKéDEX
Pokémon Diamond Pearl

THE ULTIMATE NATIONAL POKéDEX


THE OFFICIAL GUIDE FROM NINTENDO POWER
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DIAMOND
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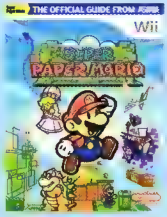
POKéMON DIAMOND AND POKéMON PEARL


THE OFFICIAL GUIDE FROM NINTENDO POWER
Wii
SUPER PAPER MARIO

SUPER PAPER MARIO

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New SUPER MARIO BROS.

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS.

Wii

- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

- POKéMON XD: GALE OF DARKNESS

NINTENDO DS

- ANIMAL CROSSING: WILD WORLD
- PUPS: THE OFFICIAL NINTENDOGS COMPANION
- FINAL FANTASY IV ADVANCE
- MARIO & LUIGI: PARTNERS IN TIME
- METROID PRIME HUNTERS
- POKéMON RANGER
- POKéMON MYSTERY DUNGEON: BLUE/RED RESCUE TEAM
- YOSHI'S ISLAND DS

GAME BOY ADVANCE

- MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA (GBA)
- POKéMON EMERALD (GBA)

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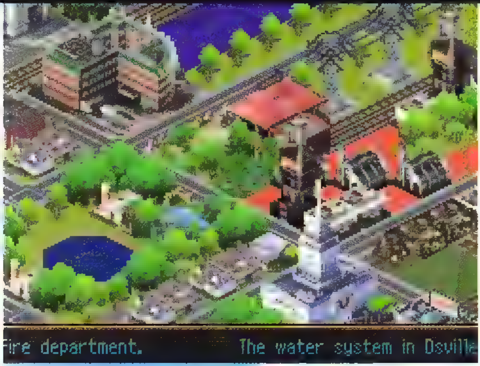

Fire department. The water system in Dsville

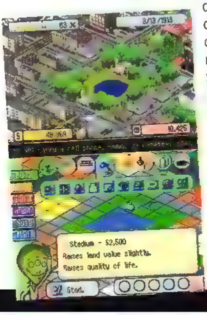
SIMMER IN THE CITY

SIMCITY DS

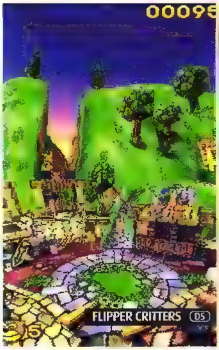
RATING: 8.0

PLATFORM: Nintendo DS
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: AKI/EAP Japan
ESRB: Everyone

The essential SimCity experience is both creative and managerial, and to make it work you need an interface that lets you access and manipulate elements on the landscape with precision. That is to say, if you're going to build a sandcastle, you'd better have a good shovel and a bucket. The PC and Mac entries in the SimCity series gave players accurate control via a mouse, but previous console versions suffered from awkward controller interfaces. Thankfully, the DS version's stylus-driven controls and dual screens (featuring a useful zoom function) provide all the precision necessary to get the job done right. In fact, the dual-screen interface allows you to monitor the city as you check data or place new facilities, whereas other versions force you to switch between screens to see all the goodies. The graphics are surprisingly detailed, as well; you can clearly distinguish between different types of buildings, and you can even see animations of traffic on the city's streets. A handy magnifying-glass cursor lets you view specific details of every location. The game also includes disaster-recovery scenarios, a Wi-Fi mail feature for trading gifts with other players, and an extra collection of famous landmark buildings.


Stadium - $2,500
Raises land value slightly.
Raises quality of life.

EA has packed a lot into the pint-sized sim, but they failed to squeeze in some features that SimCity vets have come to expect. My biggest gripe is that there's just one save slot, so any time you want to try something new, you've got to trash your existing city. Second gripe: no terrain manipulation, so you're stuck with building on a limited number of preset maps. Third, there's less infrastructure to deal with than in recent SimCity games, making this a simpler model, and therefore less challenging than SimCity 3000 and SimCity 4. Even without these features, I expect I'll be spending time with SimCity DS a year from now, when many other titles will be gathering dust. If you've never played a SimCity game, ask yourself if you like the process of building things or if you like things that are already built. If your answer is the former, SimCity DS is for you. —Scott P.



RATATOUILLE (Wii)

CODE LYOKO (DS)

FLIPPER CRITTERS

RATING: 4.5

PLATFORM: Nintendo DS
PUBLISHER: Ignition Entertainment
DEVELOPER: Zen Studios
ESRB: Everyone

Looking like a world of Rare rejects, pinball adventure Flipper Critters' brightly colored, creature-crammed setting is sugary to the point of tooth decay. The dialogue, too, is more precious than helpful. But, if you're looking to bounce the ball around for a shot of flipper flapping, you can do so in a string of six fantasy-tinged pinball boards. Though your view extends across both screens, the action is relegated to the bottom screen, making for tight pinball-playing quarters. Much of the play has you hitting obstacles out of the way with your creature-turned-ball so that you can gain access to advanced levels. The problem is that obstacles will move back into your way if you hit them again, resulting in sessions of much movement but little progress. And to keep you guessing, the game's animal inhabitants rarely give you useful instructions for where to go next. All in all, the game would have benefited from less character and more clarity. —George S.

RATATOUILLE

RATING: 7.5

PLATFORM: Wii
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Asobo/Heavy Iron
ESRB: Everyone

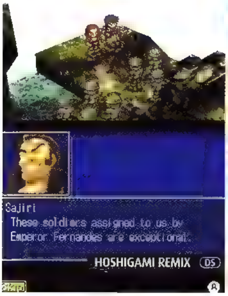
If you happen to be a rodent aficionado or a gaming gourmand, then Ratatouille is most definitely for you. But should you happen to be neither, you'll still find a solid, enjoyable platformer based on Pixar's latest flick. Most of the gameplay is typical (if unspectacular) platforming fare: you run, double-jump, climb, swing, and tail-swipe your way through 20-plus missions spread across six quasi-open-world environments, aided by a sniffing ability that keeps you pointed toward your next objective. The controls are competent and the game looks decent, but the action really becomes fun when you partake of one of the Cooking Mama-style minigames or enter one of 10 challenging but optional dream levels (think food-themed versions of the toy-block stages from Super Mario Sunshine). Loads of unlockables and a handful of multiplayer modes round out the respectable package. —Chris H.

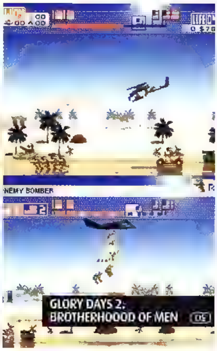
CODE LYOKO

RATING: 7.0

PLATFORM: Nintendo DS
PUBLISHER: The Game Factory
DEVELOPER: DC Studios
ESRB: Everyone 10+

Probably the most ambitious title to come from The Game Factory to date, cartoon-series adaptation Code Lyoko is two adventures in one. The real-world-set sections of the 15-level game are walk-and-talk item-collection sequences in which the story's student heroes explore a vast school with a 2-D look but 3-D depth. Since the connected school areas don't follow a consistent directional orientation, it's easy to get turned around and it's common to get lost, even though the game gives you two types of maps (neither very useful). More successful (but still with navigation problems) are the 3-D sections in computer world Lyoko. There the characters get to flex their special abilities (climbing, flying, etc.) and fight computer-generated enemies. The action is smooth, but in this advanced age of 3-D gaming there's no excuse for not being able to fight and move at the same time.
—George S.


Sajiri
These soldiers assigned to us by Emperor Fernandes are exceptional.



HOSHIGAMI REMIX

RATING: 6.0

PLATFORM: **Nintendo DS**
PUBLISHER: **Aksys Games**
DEVELOPER: **ArcSystemWorks**
ESRB: **Everyone**

It's a shame that we haven't seen more strategy-RPGs on the DS. With two screens and touch control, the system seems a perfect match for the genre. Hoshigami Remix—a port of an obscure PlayStation title—takes advantage of its new home by banishing stats and meters and such to the top screen, leaving the game board on the lower screen uncluttered. This makes touch control possible—but sadly, the feature is not implemented well. The game's pacing is painfully slow to begin with, and touch control slows things down even more. Remix takes steps in the right direction by streamlining some of the battle mechanics from the original, but it doesn't go far enough. Completing one battle takes way too long, yet a character can die in a heartbeat if you make one tiny misstep.

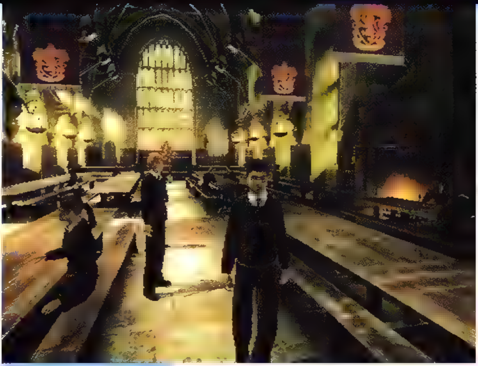
Compared to your standard strategy-RPG, Hoshigami Remix is hard-core complex. It boasts a handful of truly unique features, such as the RAP (Ready-for-Action Points) system, which allows you to decide how many points to spend on each character during a turn. You can spend points on actions such as moving, fighting, and casting spells—sometimes all in the same turn. And the fewer points you spend, the higher your character's position will be in the battle queue and the sooner he'll get to act again. The RAP system, along with session combos, multilevel battlefields, and a number of other complexities, opens up the strategy options extensively while making every move more consequential. There's an Easy mode, but the game's steep learning curve will still have most players resetting often. If you're new to the genre, Hoshigami is not a good entry point. If you're a seasoned strategy gamer, though, it offers some intriguing challenges, a decent story, and many, many hours of gameplay. —**Andy M.**

GLORY DAYS 2: BROTHERHOOD OF MEN

RATING: 6.0

PLATFORM: **Nintendo DS**
PUBLISHER: **Eidos**
DEVELOPER: **Odenis Studio**
ESRB: **Everyone 10+**

Imagine the most intricate, feature-laden knockoff of the old arcade game Choplifter, and you'll have an idea of what Glory Days 2 is about. In this sequel to the GBA's Super Army War, you must pilot either a chopper or a jet (depending on the level) over a 2-D battlefield where two armies of tanks, missile launchers, and infantry units march toward each other. Your job is to give cover to your advancing ranks using an assortment of aerial weaponry until they can overtake their opponent's base. While the graphics look alright and the campy storyline during the intermissions is so bad it's good, the gameplay just doesn't cut it. The unusual action style and play mechanics are disorienting at first, but once you get the hang of it the monotonous level design quickly becomes boring. The controls are particularly infuriating: You both control your aircraft and perform special attacks with the touch screen. Not surprisingly, you all too often trigger a carpet bomb when you mean to deploy paratroopers, or vice versa. —**Chris S.**



CHARMED AND JINXED

HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

RATING: 7.0

PLATFORM: **Nintendo Wii**
PUBLISHER: **Electronic Arts**
DEVELOPER: **EA UK**
ESRB: **Everyone 10+**

In regards to its living, breathing, authentic re-creation of Hogwarts, the Wii version of Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix is a success. More than any previous Potter title, the game pulls you in with a fully interactive (and visually impressive) world filled with exactly the sorts of things you'd expect—secret passages, talking portraits, magic classes, wizard duels, and more. Casting spells with the Wii remote is natural and intuitive (with the exception of Reducto, which just doesn't want to work), and the fact that you can walk from literally one end of Hogwarts to the other—with no loading—makes it easy to get caught up in its magical mythology.

When it comes to a compelling gameplay experience, however, you might wish you could conjure up something more substantial. While all the bonus trappings—the discoveries, the minigames, the optional quests—are nifty, the actual meat of the game is a bit lacking. Many of the plot-based missions are nothing more than fetch quests that have you running back and forth across the school grounds (thank goodness for the Marauder's Map), and though some tasks are fun—particularly the ones that combine spellcasting with light platforming—more interesting missions and more variety would have gone a long way. The one brief broom-flying segment in which you play as Fred (or is it George?) Weasley is a blast; it's too bad there aren't more scenes like that.

It's also unfortunate that some of the most interesting parts of the story are relegated to cut-scenes. The scene with the centaurs in the Forbidden Forest is just begging to be playable, and it's a shame that the visit to the Ministry of Magic features no exploration—just a few battles in which you don't even play as Harry. And would it be too much to ask for Ron and Hermione to not impede your movement at every turn? While the Potter faithful will likely love Order of the Phoenix nonetheless, players who don't know Reducto from Reducio may want to wait for a more-satisfying Potter game. —**Chris H.**

[ARCHIVE]

SEE YOU AT THE MOVIES

There are still plenty of blockbuster movies (and games based on them) on the way this year and plenty of video game adaptations hit Nintendo platforms last month. Unfortunately, not all of them lived up to their big-screen counterparts—the Wii versions of Pirates of the Caribbean and Spider-Man 3 received scores of 4.5 and 6.0 respectively. The DS versions of these same games did a little better, with scores of 7.0.

SCORES REFLECT INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS' OPINIONS.
• INDICATES WI-FI COMPATIBLE

Wii				
The Ant Bully	N/A	Midway	211	E10+
Avatar: The Last Airbender	N/A	THQ	211	E10+
The Barnyard	N/A	THQ	211	E10+
Bionicle Heroes	5.0	Eidos	216	E10+
Blazing Angels: Squadrons of WWII	7.0	Ubisoft	215	T
Bust-A-Move Bash!	6.5	Majesco	217	E
Call of Duty 3	6.5	Activision	211	T
Cars	N/A	THQ	211	E
Chicken Little: Ace in Action	7.0	Buena Vista	212	E10+
Cooking Mama: Cook Off	7.5	Majesco	216	E
Cosmic Family	N/A	Ubisoft	215	E
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2	7.0	Atari	211	T
Elebits	7.5	Konami	212	E
Escape from Bug Island!	3.5	Eidos	217	M
Excite Truck	8.5	Nintendo	211	E
Far Cry: Vengeance	4.0	Ubisoft	212	M
The Godfather Blackhand Edition	8.0	Electronic Arts	216	M
The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy	N/A	Midway	211	E10+
GT Pro Series	5.0	Ubisoft	211	E
Happy Feet	4.5	Midway	211	E
Heatseeker	7.5	Codemasters	215	T
Ice Age 2. The Meltdown	N/A	Sierra	212	E10+
Kororinpa: Marble Mania	7.0	Hudson Soft/Konami	215	E
The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess	9.5	Nintendo	211	T
Madden NFL 07	8.5	Electronic Arts	211	E
Mario Party 8	7.5	Nintendo	217	E
Marvel· Ultimate Alliance	8.0	Activision	211	T
Medal of Honor: Vanguard	6.0	Electronic Arts	217	T
Meet the Robinsons	6.5	Buena Vista	215	E10+
Metal Slug Anthology	8.0	SNK Playmore USA	211	T
Monster 4x4· World Circuit	6.5	Ubisoft	211	E
Mortal Kombat: Armageddon	8.0	Midway	217	M
Need for Speed· Carbon	6.0	Electronic Arts	212	E10+
Open Season	N/A	Ubisoft	211	E10+
Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End	4.5	Disney Interactive	217	T
Prince of Persia: Rival Swords	7.0	Ubisoft	215	T
Rampage: Total Destruction	6.5	Midway	211	E10+
Rapala Tournament Fishing	N/A	Activision	212	E
Rayman Raving Rabbids	7.5	Ubisoft	211	E
Red Steel	8.0	Ubisoft	211	T
Sonic and the Secret Rings	8.5	Sega	214	E
Spider-Man 3	6.0	Activision	217	T
SpongeBob SquarePants: Creature from the Krusty Krab	7.0	THQ	211	E
SSX Blur	8.5	Electronic Arts	215	E
Super Paper Mario	9.5	Nintendo	216	E
Super Monkey Ball. Banana Blitz	8.5	Sega	211	E
Super Swing Golf	7.5	Tecmo	212	E
Surf's Up	6.0	Ubisoft	217	E10+
Tamagotchi: Party On!	2.5	Namco Bandai	217	E
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 07	8.5	Electronic Arts	215	E
TMNT	5.0	Ubisoft	215	E10+
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent	6.0	Ubisoft	211	M
Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam	7.5	Activision	212	E10+
Trauma Center. Second Opinion	8.5	Atlus	211	T
WarioWare: Smooth Moves	9.0	Nintendo	212	E
Wii Play	7.0	Nintendo	213	E
Wii Sports	8.0, 8.5	Nintendo	211	E
Wing Island	5.5	Hudson Soft/Konami	215	E
World Series of Poker· Tournament of Champions	N/A	Activ sion	212	T
NINTENDO GAMECUBE				
The Ant Bully	5.0	Midway	208	E10+
Avatar. The Last Airbender	7 0	THQ	210	E
The Barnyard	6 0	THQ	207	E10+
Baten Kaitos Origins	8.0	Nintendo	209	T
Bionicle Heroes	5.0	Eidos	211	E10+
Bratz: Forever Diamonds	N/A	THQ	210	E
Cars	6.5	THQ	206	E
FIFA 07	8.0	Electronic Arts	210	E
Flushed Away	6.5	D3PA	210	E
The Grim Adventures of Billy and Mandy	6.5	Midway	210	E10+
Happy Feet	N/A	Midway	211	E
The Legend of Spyro: A New Beginning	5.5	Sierra	209	E10+
The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess	9.5	Nintendo	212	T
LEGO *Star Wars* II. The Original Trilogy	7.5	LucasArts	209	E10+
Madden NFL 07	9.0	Electronic Arts	208	E
Meet the Robinsons	N/A	Buena Vista	215	E10+
Monster House	6.5	THQ	207	E10+
Naruto· Clash of Ninja 2	7.5	Tomy/D3PA	210	T
Need For Speed: Carbon	7.5	Electronic Arts	211	E10+
Nicktoons· Battle for Volcano Island	N/A	THQ	210	E
One Piece: Grand Adventure	5.5	Namco Bandai	208	T
One Piece: Pirates' Carnival	5.5	Namco Bandai	209	E
Open Season	8.0	Ubisoft	209	E10+
Pac-Man World Rally	5.5	Namco Bandai	208	E
Radio Allergy	5.0	O~3	215	E
Shrek Smash N' Crash Racing	N/A	Activision	213	E10+
The Sims 2 Pets	6.5	Electronic Arts	211	E
SpongeBob SquarePants. Creature from the Krusty Krab	8.5	THQ	210	E
Super Monkey Ball Adventure	5.5	Sega	208	E
TMNT	N/A	Ubisoft	214	E10+
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Double Agent	4.5	Ubisoft	210	M
Tomb Raider: Legend	7.5	Eidos	211	T
NINTENDO DS				
Alex Rider. Stormbreaker	4.5	THQ	208	T
Arthur and the Invisibles	N/A	Atari	213	E
Avatar: The Last Airbender	6.5	THQ	210	E
Bionicle Heroes	N/A	Eidos	211	T
• Bomberman Land Touch!	7.0	Atlus	211	E
Brain Boost: Beta Wave	N/A	Majesco	212	E
Brain Boost: Gamma Wave	N/A	Majesco	212	E
Bratz· Forever Diamonds	N/A	THQ	210	E
Break 'Em All	7.0	D3PA	206	E
Bubble Bobble Revolution	6.0	Codemasters	208	E
Cake Mania	5.5	Majesco	216	E
Cars	5.5	THQ	206	E
Cartoon Network Racing	N/A	The Game Factory	213	E
• Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin	9.0	Konami	211	T
Catz	N/A	Ubisoft	211	E
Charlotte's Web	6.0	Sega	211	E
Chicken Little: Ace in Action	6.5	Buena Vista	210	E
Children of Mana	6.5	Nintendo	210	E10+
• Clubhouse Games	7.0	Nintendo	209	E
• Contact	6.5	Atlus	209	E10+
Cookie & Cream	6.5	Agetec	217	E
Cooking Mama	7.0	Majesco	209	E
Crash Boom Bang!	4.0	Sierra	209	E
Custom Robo Arena	7.5	Nintendo	215	E10+
Death Jr. And The Science Fair of Doom	5.0	Konami	217	E10+
Deep Labyrinth	6.0	Atlus	208	E10+
• Diddy Kong Racing DS	7.5	Nintendo	213	E
• Digimon World DS	N/A	Namco Bandai	212	E
Diner Dash: Sizzle & Serve	6.5	Eidos	217	E
Disney's American Dragon: Jake Long Attack of the Dark Dragon	N/A	Buena Vista	208	E
Dogz	N/A	Ubisoft	211	E
Dragon Ball Z: Harukanaru Densetsu	4.0	Atari	217	E
Dragon Quest Heroes· Rocket Slime	9.0	Square Enix	208	E
Elite Beat Agents	9.5	Nintendo	210	E10+
Eragon	N/A	Vivendi	211	T
Etrian Odyssey	7.0	Atlus	217	T
F-24 Stealth Fighter	3.5	Majesco	215	E10+

REVIEWER NOTES

NEW YORK TIMES CROSSWORDS

Crossword puzzles aren't the flashiest diversions in the world, but they've always been a solid timekiller. Like the puzzles themselves, The New York Times Crosswords for DS doesn't do anything too wild with the format, but does serve its famous puzzles in spades. Easy navigation of the puzzle grid and forgiving touch-screen handwriting recognition make it simple enough for anyone to use. —Chris S.

›ETRIAN ODYSSEY

Some hard-core RPG fans will love Etrian Odyssey for its customizable characters, deep skill system, and old-school challenge. Personally, I found it tedious. I was expecting more from the Yuzo Koshiro soundtrack, too.

—Chris H.

SUPER PAPER MARIO

As a Paper Mario game, Super Paper Mario boasts the best story and coolest character design of any game in the series. And as a platformer, it offers a fresh new twist to the age-old genre. My only beef is that the game's stand out feature—flipping from 2-D to 3-D—is, ironically, somewhat one-dimensional. Still, it's an innovative concept that's been pulled off brilliantly. —Andy M.

FIFA 07	N/A	Electronic Arts	210	E
• Final Fantasy III	8.0	Square Enix	211	E10+
• Final Fantasy Fables. Chocobo Tales	7.0	Square Enix	216	E
Flushed Away	N/A	D3PA	210	E
Fossil League D.T C.	N/A	D3PA	214	E
Freedom Wings	6.0	Natsume	207	E10+
Full Metal Alchemist: Dual Sympathy	7.0	Destineer	212	T
Gunpey DS	6.5	Namco BAndai	210	E
Harlem Globetrotters World Tour	N/A	DSI	211	E
Harvest Moon DS	6.0	Natsume	208	E
Hi Hi Puffy AmiYumi. The Genie and the Amp	4.5	D3PA	206	E10+
Hotel Dusk. Room 215	8.0	Nintendo	213	T
Inuyasha. Secret of The Divine Jewel	6.0	Namco Bandai	213	E10+
Izuna: Legend of the Unemployed Ninja	6 5	Atlus	213	E10+
Justice League Heroes	3.0	Warner Bros.Interactive	210	E10+
Kim Possible. Global Gemini	N/A	Buena Vista	214	E10+
Kirby. Squeak Squad	7.5	Nintendo	212	E
• Konductra	N/A	O-3	208	E
Konami Classics Series Arcade Hits	7.5	Konami	214	E10+
The Legend of Spyro: A New Beginning	N/A	Sierra	209	E
LEGO *Star Wars* II: The Original Trilogy	4.5	LucasArts	209	E
Lost in Blue 2	5 0	Konami	215	E10+
Lunar Knights	8 0	Konami	213	E10+
Madden NFL 07	7.5	Electronic Arts	208	E
Mage Knight Destiny's Soldier	N/A	Namco Bandai	210	E10+
Magical Starsign	7 0	Nintendo	210	E
Mario Hoops 3-on-3	7 5	Nintendo	209	E
• Mario Vs. Donkey Kong 2. March of the Minis	7 5	Nintendo	209	E
Marvel Trading Card Game	4.0	Konami	213	T
MechAssault: Phantom War	8.0	Majesco	209	T
Meet the Robinsons	N/A	Buena Vista	215	E10+
Mega Man ZX	8.5	Capcom	208	E
Meteos Disney Magic	7 5	Buena Vista	214	E
Micro Machines V4	N/A	Codemasters	211	E
Monster Bomber	N/A	Majesco	212	E
Monster House	5.5	THQ	207	E
My Frogger: Toy Trials	N/A	Konami	211	E
Nacho Libre	7.0	Majesco	210	E10+
Naruto. Ninja Council 3	6.0	Tomy	217	E10+
Need For Speed. Carbon	N/A	Electronic Arts	211	E
Nicktoons. Battle for Volcano Island	N/A	THQ	210	E
• Open Season	N/A	Ubisoft	209	E
Over the Hedge: Hammy Goes Nuts	N/A	Activision	210	E
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Justice for All	9.0	Capcom	212	T
Pirates of the Caribbean At World's End	7 0	Disney Interactive	217	E10+
Pirates of the Caribbean. Dead Man's Chest	6.0	Buena Vista	206	T
• Planet Puzzle League	8.5	Nintendo	217	E
• Pogo Island	7.0	Electronic Arts	215	E
Point Blank DS	6 0	Namco Bandai	206	E10+
• Pokémon Diamond/Pearl	9.0	Nintendo	216	E
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team	8.0	Nintendo	209	E
Pokémon Ranger	7.0	Nintendo	210	E
Puzzle Quest. Challenge of the Warlords	4.0	D3PA	215	E10+
Quickspot	5.5	Namco Bandai	214	E10+
Rafa Nadal Tennis	N/A	Codemasters	213	E
Rainbow Islands Revolution	4.5	Codemasters	208	E
Rayman Raving Rabbids	7 0	Ubisoft	214	E
Scooby-Doo! Who's Watching Who?	6 5	THQ	210	E
The Settlers	5.0	Ubisoft	5.0	E
Shrek The Third	7.0	Activision	217	E
The Sims 2 Pets	5.5	Electronic Arts	211	E
SNK Vs. Capcom Card Fighters DS	7 0	SNK Playmore	215	T
Spectrobes	8.0	Buena Vista	214	E
Spider-Man 3	7.0	Activision	217	E10+
Spider-Man: Battle for New York	6 0	Activision	212	E10+
SpongeBob SquarePants: Creature from the Krusty Krab	N/A	THQ	210	E
Star Fox Command	9 5	Nintendo	208	E10+
Star Trek. Tactical Assault	5.5	Bethesda	210	E
Star Wars: Lethal Alliance	7.0	Ubisoft	212	E10+
Steel Horizon	4.5	Konami	214	E10+
The Suite Life of Zack & Cody	N/A	Buena Vista	208	E
Tamagotchi Connection: Cornershop 2	N/A	Namco Bandai	211	E
• Tenchu Dark Secret	5 0	Nintendo	208	T
That's So Raven: Psychic on the Scene	N/A	Buena Vista	210	E
Theme Park	6 0	Electronic Arts	215	E
Time Ace	6.5	Konami	216	E10+
TMNT	5.5	Ubisoft	214	E10+
Tom and Jerry Tales	N/A	Warner Bros. Interactive	210	E
Tomb Raider. Legend	4.5	Eidos	210	T
• Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam	7.5	Activision	211	E
Totally Spies! 2. Undercover	N/A	Atari	213	E10+
Touch Detective	6.0	Atlus	210	E10+
Touch The Dead	5.5	Eidos	217	M
Trioncube	5.5	Namco Bandai	213	E
Wario Master of Disguise	6.5	Nintendo	214	E10+
Winning Eleven Pro Evolution Soccer 2007	6.5	Konami	213	E
Xiaolin Showdown	5.0	Konami	212	E
Yoshi's Island DS	8.0	Nintendo	211	E
• Yu-Gi-Oh! Spirit Caller	N/A	Konami	213	E
• Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship Tournament 2007	N/A	Konami	215	E
GAME BOY ADVANCE				
Alex Rider. Stormbreaker	N/A	THQ	208	E10+
The Ant Bully	N/A	Midway	208	E
Arthur and the Invisibles	N/A	Atari	213	E
Avatar: The Last Airbender	N/A	THQ	210	E
Babar to the Rescue	N/A	The Game Factory	206	E
Back to Stone	N/A	Graffiti Entertainment	214	E
Backyard Basketball 2007	N/A	Atari	209	E
The Barnyard	6.5	THQ	207	E
Battle B-Daman	6.5	Atlus	207	E
Battle B-Daman: Fire Spirits!	6.5	Atlus	210	E
Bionicle Heroes	N/A	Eidos	211	E
Bratz. Forever Diamonds	N/A	THQ	210	E
Capcom Classics Mini Mix	7.5	Capcom	209	T
Cars	6.5	THQ	206	E
The Cheetah Girls	N/A	Buena Vista	208	E
Disney's American Dragon: Jake Long—Rise of the Huntsclan	N/A	Buena Vista	208	E10+
Eragon	N/A	Vivendi	211	E10+
FIFA 07	N/A	Electronic Arts	210	E
Final Fantasy V Advance	8.5	Nintendo	210	E
Final Fantasy VI Advance	9.5	Nintendo	213	E10+
Flushed Away	N/A	D3PA	210	E
Foster's Home For Imaginary Friends	N/A	Crave Entertainment	213	E
Games Explosion!	4.0	THQ	208	E
Ghost Rider	N/A	2K Games	213	T
Harlem Globetrotters World Tour	N/A	DSI	211	E
Justic League Heroes: The Flash	5.5	Warner Bros. Interactive	210	E10+
The Legend of Spyro: A New Beginning	N/A	Sierra	209	E
LEGO *Star Wars* II: The Original Trilogy	N/A	LucasArts	209	E
Madden NFL 07	7.0	Electronic Arts	208	E
Mazes of Fate	N/A	Graffiti Entertainment	213	T
Meet the Robinsons	N/A	Buena Vista	215	E
Mega Man Battle Network 6: Cybeast Gregar & Cybeast Falzar	7.5	Capcom	206	E
Miss Spider's Harvest Time Hop & Fly	N/A	The Game Factory	206	E
Monster House	5.0	THQ	207	E
Naruto: Ninja Council 2	5.5	Tomy/D3PA	210	E10+
Need For Speed: Carbon	N/A	Electronic Arts	211	E
Nicktoons: Battle for Volcano Island	N/A	THQ	210	E
Open Season	N/A	Ubisoft	209	E
Over the Hedge. Hammy Goes Nuts	N/A	Activision	210	E
Phil of the Future	N/A	Buena Vista	208	E
Pirates of the Caribbean Dead Man's Chest	7.5	Buena Vista	206	E10+
Pokémon Mystery Dungeon. Red Rescue Team	8.0	Nintendo	209	E
Polarium Advance	N/A	Atlus	212	E
The Santa Clause 3	N/A	Buena Vista	209	E
Shrek Smash N' Crash Racing	N/A	Activision	213	E10+
The Sims 2 Pets	N/A	Electronic Arts	211	E
Sonic the Hedgehog Genesis	6.0	Sega	211	E
SpongeBob SquarePants: Creature from the Krusty Krab	N/A	THQ	210	E
Sudoku Mania	N/A	UFO Interactive	206	E
Summon Night. Swordcraft Story	8.0	Atlus	207	E10+
Summon Night: Swordcraft Story 2	8.0	Atlus	210	E10+
Super Robot Taisen: Original Generation	6.5	Atlus	207	T
Super Robot Taisen. Original Generation 2	7.0	Atlus	211	T
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Double Pack	N/A	Konami	206	E
TMNT	7.0	Ubisoft	214	E10+
Tom and Jerry Tales	N/A	Warner Bros. Interactive	210	E
Tomb Raider: Legend	N/A	Eidos	210	T
Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam	7.5	Activision	211	E
Totally Spies! 2: Undercover	N/A	Atari	213	E10+
Yggdra Union	7.5	Atlus	211	T

MARVEL: ULTIMATE ALLIANCE

Playing games like Marvel: Ultimate Alliance (and other similarly structured games, like Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End) makes me realize that developers have some way to go in adapting Wii motion controls to fast-paced action. Ultimate Alliance does it better than most by giving you a lot of variety for each swing of the remote, but it's still too imprecise for my liking. —Giancarlo V.

>HOTEL DUSK: ROOM 215

Hotel Dusk is the first game in a long time with characters that aren't simply iconic, cardboard avatars. I'd love to see this type of noir-inspired crime procedural show up on the Wii at some point.

—Drew W.

ESCAPE FROM BUG ISLAND!

Steve awarded Escape from Bug Island! a score of 3.5 in last month's issue, and I have to say that I admire his generosity of spirit. The only things I liked about the game were the Japanese title, Necronesia, and the cool praying mantis art on the Japanese box. Now those things are gone, and all I'm left with is the scent of Raid Yard Guard spray in my nostrils. Sure, you can hit gorillas in the crotch with a stick, but you'll be amazed how boring that activity becomes after a while. The gorillas' eyes don't even bug out! —Drew W.

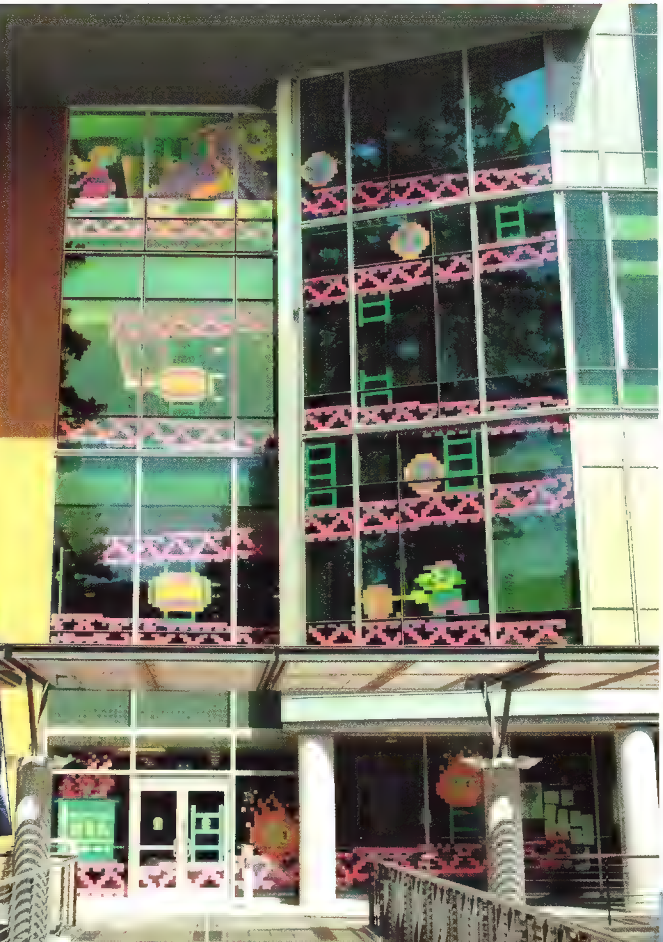
ARTS & CRAFTS

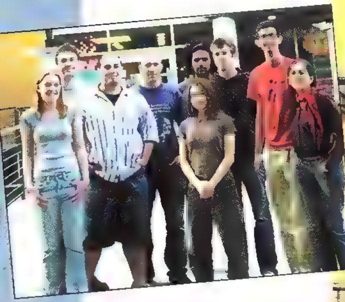
Post-Modern Art

Who needs paint and canvas when you've got thousands of Post-It notes and one gigantic building?

Building E2 at the School of Engineering, UC Santa Cruz has become known for something more than boring lectures. In 2005, an anonymous group of students created a Mario mural out of Post-It notes on the building's glass front. The installation wasn't up for very long, but it was seen by thousands and immortalized forever on the Web.

This year, Ian R. and a small army of his classmates decided to one-up the 2005 effort with a much larger work, based on another Nintendo classic: Donkey Kong. "Exposure to video games early in childhood inspired a lot of current engineering students to pursue the field," says Ian. "For a lot of us, that was Super Mario Bros. and its sequels. I wanted to stick (pun fully intended) with honoring Shigeru Miyamoto as in 2005, and of his early games Donkey Kong was the best fit for the space." Unlike the first project, this one was executed with the permission of the school, and the Post-It art will likely become a tradition due to its popularity with the student body. Says Ian, "We'll probably be doing this again in fall (likely Duck Hunt) and spring (Zelda or Metroid)." —Andy M.

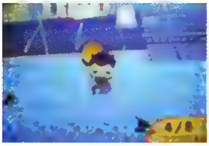




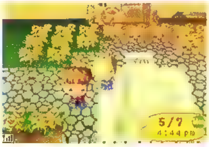
ANIMAL CROSSING

Pattern Recognition

The world of Animal Crossing is a wild one indeed, as indicated by the flood of photos we receive each month. Our readers have pushed the pattern editor to its very limit, yet they continue to surprise us. This month, we thought we'd recognize two especially clever entries. —ANDY M.



Eric A.'s Animal Crossing character can actually walk on water—unfortunately, it's shark-infested water.

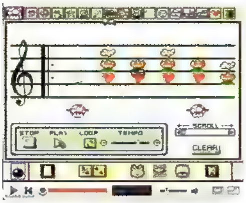


Alex V.'s desire to see Animal Crossing on Wii inspired him to create a Wii in Animal Crossing.

WEBSITES

Follow the Bouncing Mario

Head to www.youtube.com/tombobblender and check out this dude's wizardry with Mario Paint's music sequencer. He's arranged a ton of different video game themes, including Street Fighter II and Super Mario RPG tunes. After dinking around with the music-creation tool ourselves, we can testify that what you're hearing is seriously impressive. The unconventional use of sounds such as a dog's bark is particularly creative. Bravo! —CHRIS S.

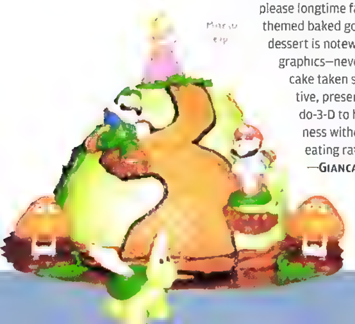


TomBob is a music teacher, so he knows a good Mega Man track when he hears one.

FOOD

Super Cake Bros.

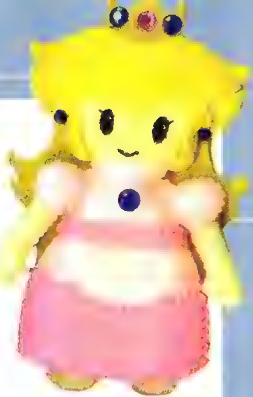
The sister of NP reader Paul crafted this multifaceted hill of Super Mario tastiness for his 21st birthday. The presence of Mario, Luigi, and Peach as well as Koopas and Goombas should please longtime fans of Mario Bros.-themed baked goods. But this particular dessert is noteworthy for its creative graphics—never before has a Mario cake taken such a unique perspective, presenting its world in pseudo-3-D to help convey deliciousness without sacrificing the eating rate. Delightful. —GIANCARLO V.



ARTS & CRAFTS

Just Peachy!

Mei, one of our readers from the Great North (also known as Canada), sent in this sweet Princess Peach caricature. The doll is entirely original, and crafted mostly out of felt. Says Mei: "I also put a few plastic gems on there to jazz her up a little." Well done! —ANDY M.

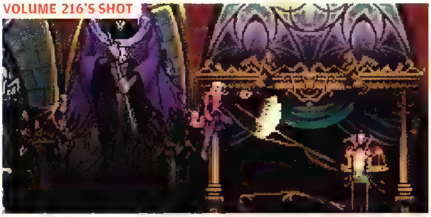


SCREEN TEST

Kiss the Cook

We love us some Cooking Mama around these parts, and we thought the Wii game would make for some great captions. Send your best caption to community@nintendopower.com—if we don't like it, our eyes will flame with anger. For now, though, sit back and enjoy part two of our Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin screen test.

VOLUME 216'S SHOT



"Only Jonathan knew Dracula's dark secret: lactose intolerance." —my_loose_thread

"Try a free sample of Death By Chocolate." —Derreck B.

"After losing the Vampire Killer whip, Jonathan decided to resort to Cool Whip pies instead." —Drill H.

"Ha-do-ken!" —jsanti1

"When I run out of bullets, all dignity goes to the wind." —Jacob B

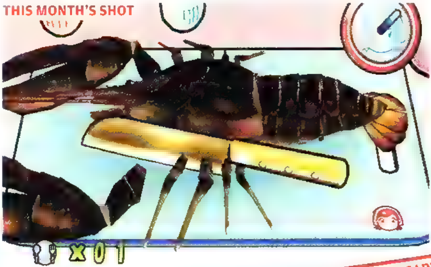
"Im in ur castle, throwing ur pies." —Omar Siegfried

"The power of cream compels you!" —Himoura

"It is not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for . . . ooh! Pie!" —super_bug_boy

"Little did either of them know the Grim Reaper was not just there for the buffet." —Tyler B.

THIS MONTH'S SHOT



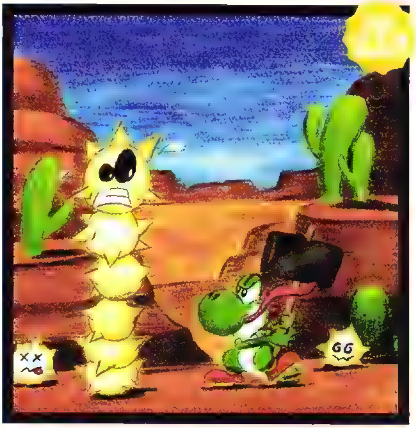
"Sorry, son . . . we're gonna have to amputate."

HERE'S OUR CAPTION. Think you can do better?

ART OF THE MONTH

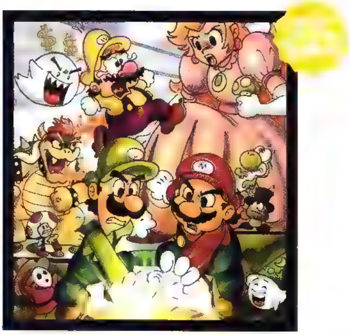
Party Labor

Mario Party 8 was the theme of May's art of the month, but SSJDAVID went with a slightly more generic Mario theme. Regardless, his meticulous effort paid off. TOMPRESTON's extraordinary composition was nearly a unanimous winner.



ARTIST:
SSJDAVID

SUBJECT:
MARIO PARTY 8



ARTIST:
TOMPRESTON

SUBJECT:
MARIO PARTY 8

Looking to submit art for the first time and not sure what to do? Visit **forums.nintendo.com** for details. Be sure to read the rules before you post your masterpieces.

Reader Review

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!

Each month we encourage our readers to submit reviews of games, but remember to follow the rules: keep them under 300 words, and check your spelling! If you'd like to submit a review for NP, first become an Nsider at Nintendo.com. Then head to the Reviews forum and submit your game critique. Reviews are selected based on overall writing quality, objectivity, and game knowledge.

Lost in Blue 2

Reviewed by: BLUEJ33

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to live on a deserted island? What would you eat? How would you survive? Could you escape? Konami's recently released sequel Lost in Blue 2 lets you answer these questions for yourself on the Nintendo DS.

The premise of Lost in Blue 2 is straightforward: two youths are stranded on a deserted island after their cruise ship sinks in a storm. Together they must find food, create tools, and stay alive until they can find some way to escape.

What makes Lost in Blue such a joy to play is that every step toward survival and freedom is performed through very creative use of the DS. Activities such as building a fire, cooking, fishing, and hunting all take unique advantage of the DS's touch-sensitive screen and microphone.

Lost in Blue 2 sports numerous improvements over its prequel. The island is far bigger, and the feeling of being lost is more enhanced. Also, there's a sense of danger present throughout the game that was nonexistent in the first Lost in Blue. Coming into contact with wild animals makes the island seem much more believable and makes life on the island far more treacherous.

Lost in Blue 2 is a great game, but there are a few flaws. Most noticeable is the fact that it's so similar to the original game. The graphics are nearly identical, as are the voice-overs and music. It's still very fun, but it would have been nice to see more improvements over the first game.

Despite those few minor shortcomings, Lost in Blue 2 is one of the best DS games on the market today. If you're looking for a top-notch adventure game, then this is the game for you.

CALL TO ACTION

Old-School NP

Remember when Nintendo Power used to look like . . . uh, a completely different magazine? Yeah, we have fond memories, too. Now that Wii's Virtual Console is bursting at the seams with old-school goodness, we thought we'd ask: What's your favorite NP article of all time?

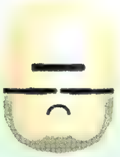
community@nintendopower.com

MII OF THE MONTH

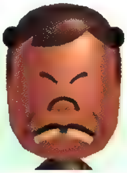
Cry Mii a River

The Miis keep coming, and they're getting crazier by the month! Only one look-alike Mii—Robocop—made it into our top four, mostly because we were scared of what he'd do if we left him out. But the blue ribbon goes to Paul M.'s CryBaby Jr. because of its clever use of the eyebrows! Nicely done, Paul—we hope you're crying tears of joy now! —ANDY M.

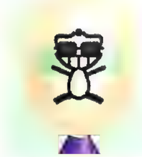
Runners-Up:



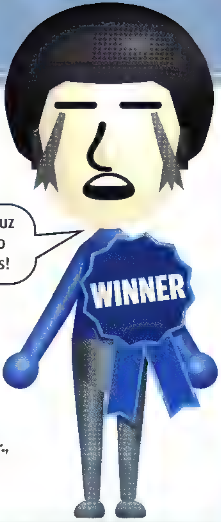
Robocop, by Dennis Z.



Bucky Beav, by Jonathan M.



ManOnFace, by Luke & Matt


I'm sad 'cuz I have no eyebrows!
WINNER

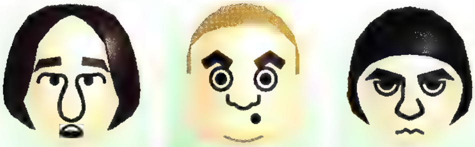
Winner

CryBaby Jr.,
by Paul M.

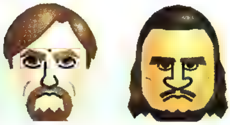
Miis of a Feather

Mii of the Month has quickly become a favorite Community feature among readers, but it doesn't accomodate for Miis that are members of a group. This month, we thought we'd share some of our favorite Mii posses we've received over the past few months. —ANDY M.

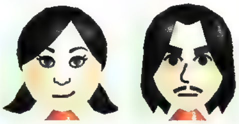
Larry, Curly, and Moe of The Three Stooges, by Connor B.



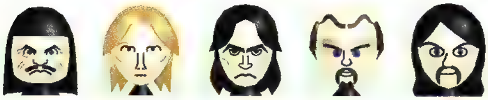
Obi-Wan Kenobi and Qui-Gon Jinn of *Star Wars*, by Ben N.



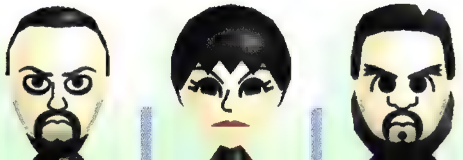
Meg and Jack White of The White Stripes, by Chris H.



William, Skwisgaar, Nathan, Pickles, and Toki of Adult Swim show *Metalocalypse*, by Chris G.



General Zod, Ursa, and Non of the *Superman* movies, by Matt M.



SUBSCRIBER PROFILE

Meet a fellow NP reader and Nintendo fan.

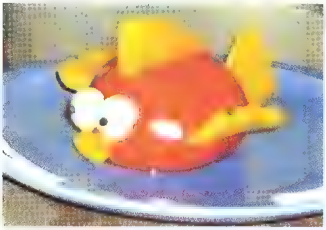
Name:
Tori M.

Age:
24

Subscriber since:
1997

Favorite game:
Harvest Moon 64

In addition to gaming, subscriber Tori M. loves preparing food—both in Cooking Mama and in real life. She made this stuffed-tomato Cheep Cheep, which won a contest and earned her a custom Cooking Mama embroidered apron! Tori is currently in college, but she's been gaming since the age of eight. "I even attribute my 4.0 in college, in part, to skills I learned from video games, such as problem-solving ability (Resident Evil and Zelda), quick reflexes (Mario), and of course the rewards of hard work and diligence (Harvest Moon)."



September 2007 Vol. 219

NEXT MONTH

We've got more Wii and DS action lined up for September than you can shake a stick at, not to mention a Wii remote or stylus.

PRIME TIME

We're finally lifting the visor on Metroid Prime 3: Corruption for Wii, and we think you're going to love what you see.

RABBID TRANSIT

NP travels to France to bring you the story of Ubisoft's Rayman Raving Rabbids 2. What will the furry fiends be up to this time?

WRASSLIN' WRAP-UP

Is it real or is it staged? Nintendo Power will take you behind the scenes of THQ's WWE SmackDown Vs. Raw 2008 for Wii and DS to get all the answers.

TO THE MOON & HACK

Rune Factory: A Fantasy Harvest Moon combines elements of RPG adventuring and farming for DS warriors with green thumbs. We'll show you how to slay ogres with a watering can.

CONTACTS

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1-800-255-3700
(1-800-422-4281 TDD)
Note: 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. Pacific Standard Time, every day. French- and Spanish-speaking representatives are available. (We are unable to answer gameplay questions on this line.)

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Prerecorded Game Tips and Future Product Information
Get complete game walk-throughs on the most popular games for Nintendo systems. This call may be long-distance, so be sure to get permission from whoever pays the phone bill before you call. For a complete list of games available on the Power Line, check out:
www.nintendo.com/consumer/gameplay/powerline.html

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pokemon_community@nintendopower.com
pulse@nintendopower.com
E-mail sent to the above addresses will not receive a response.

ESRB GAME RATING INFORMATION
To contact the ESRB or for more information, visit www.esrb.org.
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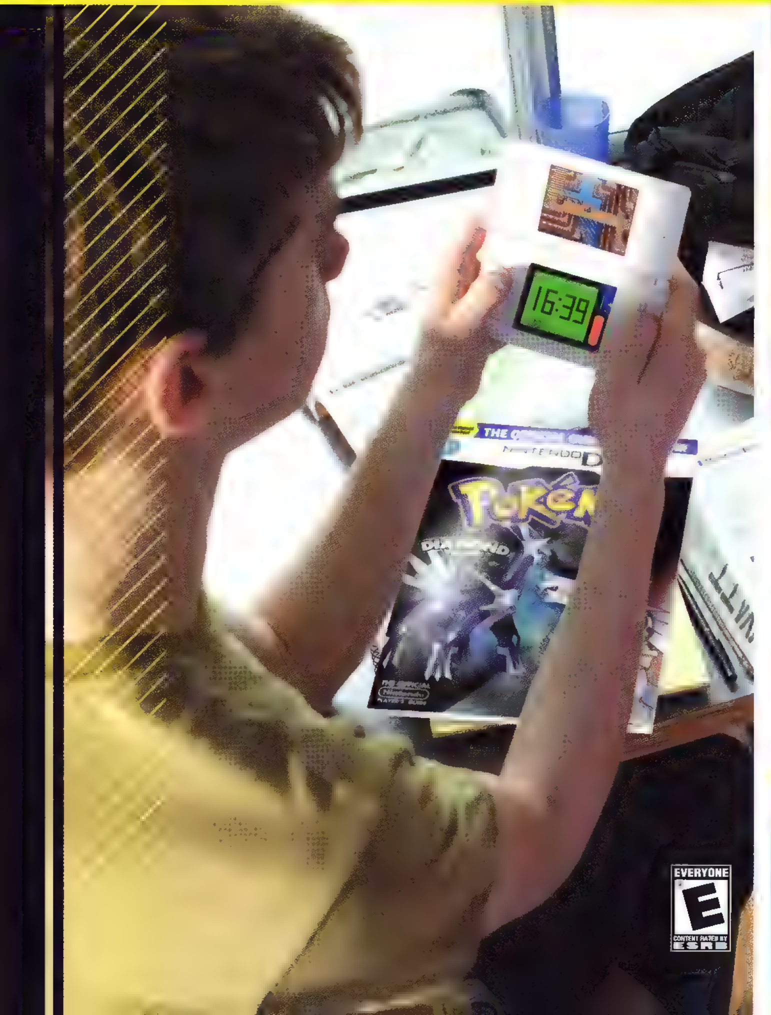
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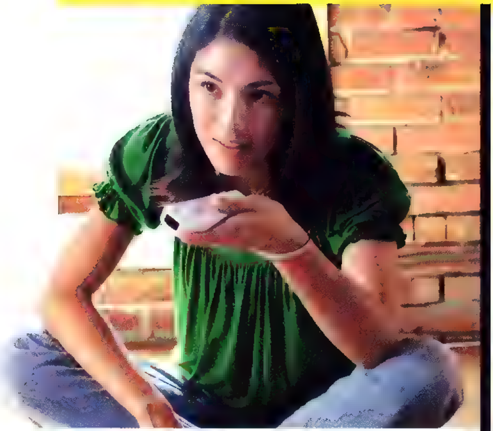

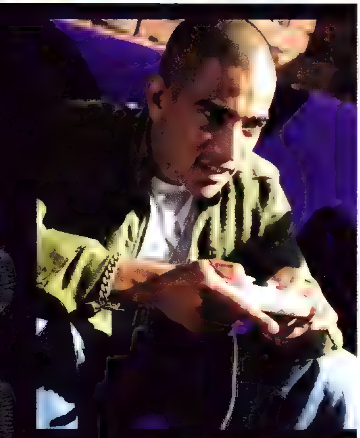

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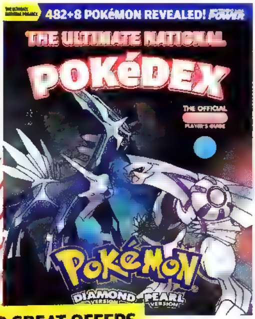

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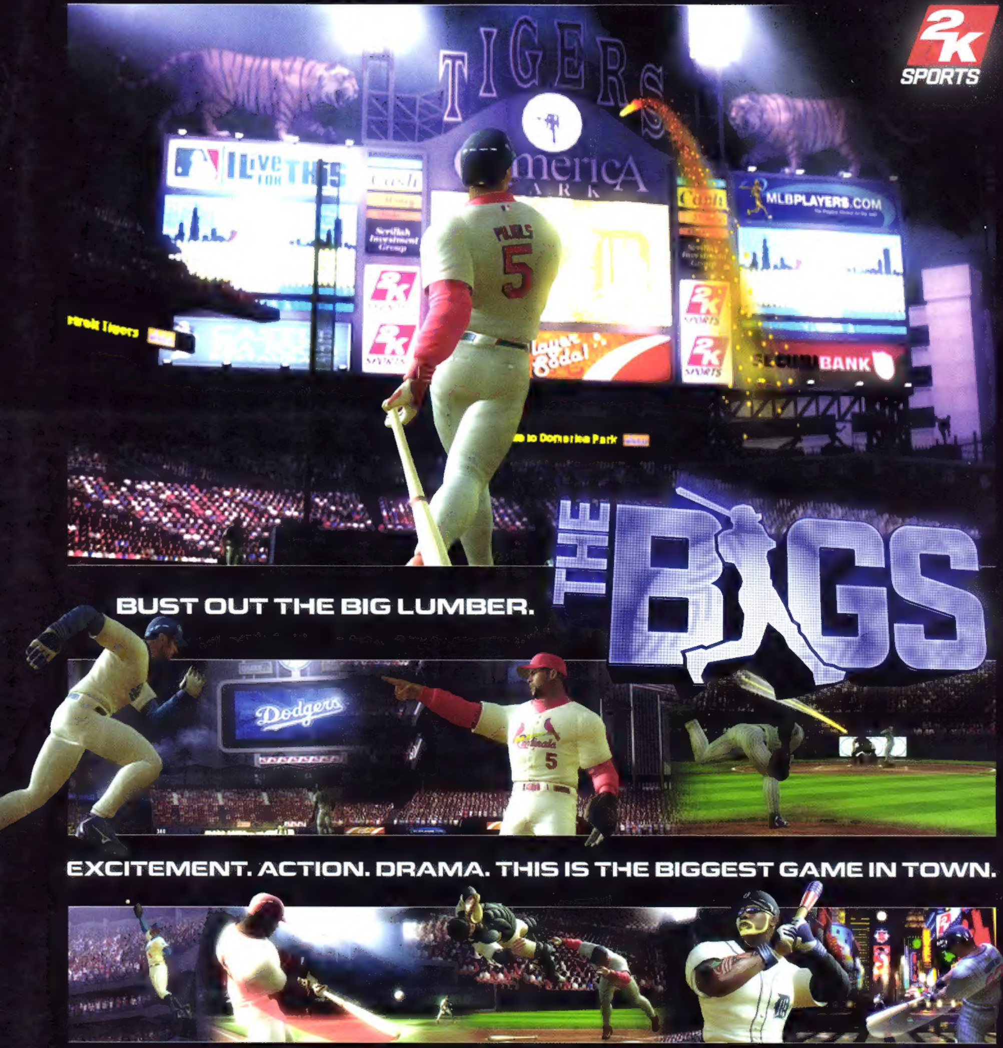

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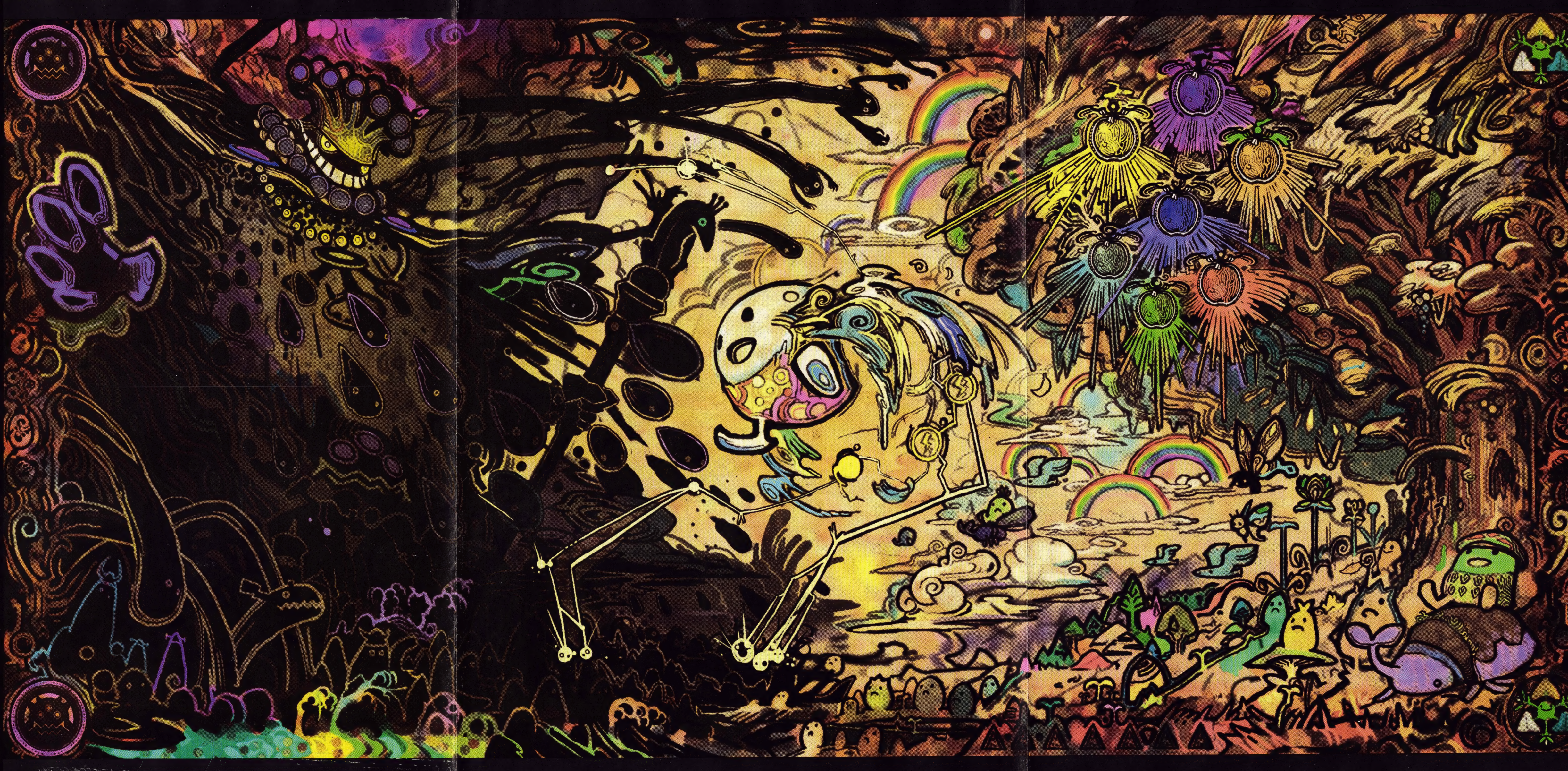

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